

When Manhattan Sank

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Complete Stories

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CHAPTER I.

THOSE who survived the destruction of Manhattan will never forget the morning of September sixteenth. I have an almost equally vivid remembrance of the evening before.

Many persons have since claimed that they sensed impending disaster for varying lengths of time prior to the first shock. Women, alleged to possess psychic power, have said that there seemed to be a great weight hanging above their heads, or that for days they felt they were walking on the edge of a great abyss. Supernatural warnings, too, were conveyed to persons who failed to heed these omens. Figures of deceased relatives, they maintain, appeared to them in their dreams and in waking visions. Others assert that, when they went to bed on the night of the fifteenth, they found difficulty in breathing.

A former night watchman at the Postum Building told me—and he evidently believed it—that about midnight he observed a blazing meteor or comet, dagger-shaped and flame-colored, streaking across the sky.

It is true that almost everybody had thought about an earthquake, because of the statement of the eminent British geologist, Sir Maurice Lockwood. About the first of the month, he had announced that there appeared to be a “fault” in the rock strata under Manhattan and added that this might slip, causing an earthquake like that which destroyed the Japanese cities. His theory, however, was not new: other scientists have held it. It was given wide publicity chiefly because of the energetic labors of a lecture-bureau press agent.

I believe any unbiased observer will agree with me that all the elaborate warnings are mere post- facto

invention, although the stories may be credited by the persons who tell them. Never did downtown New York seem more prosperous, more stimulating, more alive than on the late afternoon and evening of September fifteenth. It was a perfect late-summer day, almost too warm for comfort. The evening was luxuriously cool.

Since my brother was ending his annual week's visit to the city that night, he refused to go to a theater, saying that he preferred to talk. We ate a leisurely dinner, washed down with white wine and Swedish punch, at a little Scandinavian restaurant on upper Broadway. Matt had made sleeper reservations on a train that left the Grand Central at eleven-thirty o'clock. So, when we lighted our after-dinner cigars, we had more than two hours to waste.

We walked across the city to the Kelton Hotel where I lived, at Lexington Avenue near Forty- eighth Street.

"Have a good lunch?" I asked. Bob Wiston had taken Matt to luncheon that day at the Bankers' Club.

"Oh, yes. Wiston seems like a good fellow."

"None better," I agreed. "And how about Miss Hull?" We had had dinner at Mary Hull's apartment the night before.

"She's smart." Matt is not given to wordy praise. "She's good-looking, too. And she certainly wears clothes."

As Matt packed his bags, we split a pint of Scotch. Then Matt suggested that we go up on the hotel roof.

In the sun parlor, we found the lights turned discreetly low. Several couples were surreptitiously "necking" in the least conspicuous corners, as they do in all big hotel lounging rooms. I heard Matt sniff contemptuously.

"This is a hell of a place to live," he growled, as he walked out on the deserted roof. "The damned apartments are so small that people have to go to hotels and theaters to make love. No privacy anywhere."

"It's just your upstate farmer inhibitions that make you think it's indecent."

"I didn't say I thought it indecent," Matt retorted. "I said it was rotten taste."

I laughed at him. He always had those fits about New York. He would be enjoying himself hugely when he would suddenly remember that he did not approve of the things he was seeing and doing. Whereupon he would burst out with one of his rumbling tirades. Matt is big, blond, broad-shouldered and afraid of nothing except city traffic and rattlesnakes. I think he prefers snakes to taxis, however.

"Take that pigeonhole apartment of Miss Hull's, for instance," Matt grumbled with fine scorn, although he knew as well as I did that Mary Hull paid as much rent for those three or four rooms as Matt makes in net income from a large fruit and stock farm. "Where would you hold hands there? There's no place, if her mother was home. I looked in the kitchenette, but you couldn't get two persons inside it, even if they were parked close. Any romance in this town has to be as synthetic as the gin, I guess."

I laughed, handing Matt one of his favorite cigars. I remembered his comment when we got caught in a

midnight subway jam. "Who pours the olive oil over us?" he demanded, as we stood sardine-wise, in the choked aisle.

Matt struck a match on the seat of his trousers, a habit which he refuses to discontinue although it ruins his best clothes. "It's the one masculine gesture left in smoking," is his explanation. He puffed out an immense cloud of smoke and pointed down the street to the great bulk of another hotel, where hundreds of lighted windows gleamed through the night.

"See?" Matt indicated them. "Mother's waiting up for her boys." Without preface or apology, he turned to me. "Going to marry Miss Hull?" he demanded bluntly.

"I'm afraid not," I returned, wondering how he had guessed that I wished to.

"Why not? If you're satisfied, go ahead."

"Thanks for your permission. That's all I've been waiting for."

Matt allowed a mouthful of smoke to drift away from his lips in half-formed rings.

"Maybe you think that banker fellow's competition is too strong," he continued, in a Dorothy Dix tone, giving advice to the meek. "Don't mind him. I watched them together and she doesn't care for him."

"He's Robert Breek Wiston, with plenty of money, family and brains," I retorted hotly. "Besides, he's a darned good fellow in the bargain. He's a thousand percent better match for any girl than I am."

"Remember you're Alexander McNair Tennay, without family, money or brains," said Matt with fraternal candor. "That's why she's apt to pick you. Women love to make martyrs of themselves."

"Shut up. Besides I don't think Mary Hull cares to marry anyone."

"Don't you believe it. I've heard a lot about the 'new women' down here, but they don't come as new as that."

"Why should she?" I grew quite warm in defending Mary's right to remain unmarried. "She's made a name and a place for herself in the import trade. She's really important, a celebrity."

Matt threw back his head and laughed.

"New York broadcasting again!" He mimicked my tone perfectly. "Station B-U-N-K. That's all I hear in this place." With one sweep of his arm he included the reflection of the Broadway electric lights, the rows of Park Avenue apartment houses, the towering office buildings in the lower Forties, the East River with its miles of docks and a lighted biscuit factory in Long Island City.

"You're all important, awfully important," Matt fumed. "I've yet to meet a New Yorker who wasn't. You all admit it. Why, New York papers claim that the metropolitan murders are more murderous and the metropolitan divorces are more scandalous than our poor little affairs in the interior."

"But, Matt—"

"You and Mary Hull, for instance. You both think you're important. So you are—to yourselves. It's just the same with all the rest of these people."

“Come, Matt! Listen to me. You must admit that everything in the commercial, financial and the artistic world is centered here.”

Matt paid no attention to the interruption, but continued his recital.

“The other American cities are married to the United States, while New York's the country's kept woman. She has no legal claim for support, but as kept women always do, she gets more attention than Uncle Sam gives his wives. Sure, New York's important. So's the correspondent in a divorce suit. So were the King of France's girlfriends.”

Matt chuckled, looked at his watch and turned to the door.

“Train time?” I asked.

“Nearly.” Then Matt grinned at his figure of speech. “I admit,” he said, “that I like to romp with your wanton city. She gives me a great vacation between pear and apple picking time. But you should tell Lady Manhattan not to take herself so seriously. If she continues, I'll put a personal in the *Times* and warn her that her true character is known.”

We walked to the Grand Central Station. Just

before Matt handed his ticket and Pullman reservation to the gateman, he turned and shook hands.

“Had a fine time, Alex,” he smiled. “I like you as a brother, if you are a New Yorker. In fact, you qualify better than some of our worthy Rotarians upstate. As for Miss Hull, don't worry. She's reached the point where she'd rather listen to you than talk herself. That's the test of true love, especially with a New York woman. It doesn't last long after marriage. Enjoy it while you may. I'll come to your wedding if I'm asked.”

He started away, then paused and grinned sardonically.

“Some day I'll make you tell me how and where you found a place to propose to a girl. I'll bet you have to do it on top of a Fifth Avenue bus.” He waved his hand and passed the gate.

After Matt disappeared, I found myself wondering irresolutely about the station. An illogical but overwhelming desire to see Mary and to speak to her had grown out of his raillery. However, a few minutes before midnight is scarcely a conventional time for calling upon a woman to ask her to marry you.

I happened to remember that Bob Wiston had said he was going to Mary's apartment that evening to play a few games of double solitaire with Mary's semi-invalid mother. Double Canfield and Napoleon are Mrs. Hull's only dissipation.

I stepped into the nearest phone booth and called Wiston at the Engineers' Club.

“Has Mr. Wiston come in yet?” I asked.

“On his way upstairs now, sir. If you'll wait a minute, I'll ring his room.”

“Never mind.” I broke the connection and called Mary's apartment. Evidently Wiston had left there only a few minutes before.

“Yes?” came her voice, low-pitched and intriguing as she is herself.

“Mary, this is Alex. May I see you for a few minutes? I just put my brother on the train and I'd like to see you— Well, because— I'd like to see you,” I concluded, lamely.

She whispered her reply into the mouthpiece.

“I'm sorry I can't ask you to come over. But mother's going to bed and it would disturb her. Why do you want to see me?”

Matt's comment that there was no fit place in New York in which to propose to a girl flashed into my mind. For a moment I could think of no spot, private or even semi-private, where I might take her. How Matt would have laughed if he could have read my mind as I stood in that telephone booth.

“Well, Mary, I was—you see, I was—” I stammered, like a schoolboy.

“Alex!” Mary's voice became firm and decisive. “Have you been drinking too much?”

“No,” I roared, the injustice of the accusation stinging. “I have not been drinking enough.” I forgot all my prepared finesse. “I wanted to ask you if you'd consider marrying me.”

Mary Hull did not exactly gasp at the announcement. The sound was more like an excited giggle. I presume my indignation, when she assumed I was too familiar with a bottle, crept into my voice and that I roared at her as I do at the office boy when he forgets to mail a letter.

Mary said nothing for a minute. The telephone operator interrupted:

“Your time is up, please.”

“Don't cut us off,” I shouted. “I'll drop another nickel.” I fumbled in my change pocket and failed to find the coin. I finally dropped a quarter.

“You made a mistake in the coin, please,” piped the operator.

“Hell's bells,” I growled. “Get off that wire.”

I could hear Mary laughing.

By that time I was thoroughly angry. I swore at the telephone, the operator, at Matt, at the city, at my own stupidity. Had Matt, whose train must have been up at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, heard me, he would have laughed for a week. At length Mary halted my tirade.

“Alex, dear,” said she, “do you still want to marry me or are you changing your mind?”

“Well, do you think I paid thirty cents for this call for fun?” I retorted. “I put a quarter in this thing expecting to get my money's worth.”

“In that case, it's only fair to tell you that I would like to marry you.”

I did not know what to say next. I had a vague idea that one kissed one's betrothed as soon as possible

after such an avowal, but, obviously, that was impossible over the phone.

“Aren't you going to do something about it?” It was the only thing I could think of to say.

Mary laughed harder than ever.

“Want me to confirm it in writing?” she suggested, adding in her dictation tone: “This will confirm our telephone conversation of last night—”

“I mean go somewhere. I'm serious about this thing.”

“I can't slip out tonight, dear. It would disturb mother. Call me in the morning. . . . Yes, about eight. And, Alex, I do love you. Good night.”

Her receiver clicked as she replaced it upon the hook.

I left the Grand Central and walked north on Madison Avenue. I was not precisely elated. At least I was not conscious of any feeling of elation. Instead I was worrying over the most trivial details of our engagement and marriage. I remember that I was greatly concerned lest Mary should keep her professional name after we married, instead of calling herself Mrs. Tennay. It was the only time in my life I was ever disturbed by the activities of the Lucy Stone League. I also worried about buying an engagement ring. I wondered if it were quite all right to take Mary to the jewelry store and let her pick it out and, if I did that, how I could prevent her knowing how much it cost.

These and other ridiculous details occupied my mind while I was walking clear to Ninetieth Street. There I stopped, realized my own folly, and looked at my watch. It was one-twenty-five. I retraced my steps to Eighty-sixth Street and Lexington Avenue and entered the subway station. I caught the first downtown local train, intending to get off at Fifty-first Street.

As it happened, the train was crowded. I walked forward and stood at the front door in the first car. At my right was the motorman's boxlike control room. To that circumstance I owe my life.

As the train shot through the tube, I negligently watched the red and green signal lights that flashed past as we roared along or stopped with a rattle of doors and a grinding of air brakes at the stations.

We stopped at the Fifty-ninth Street station. More passengers entered the car, rather a jolly crowd of men and girls filled the aisle behind me. The train moved on, gathering speed as it went.

The first shock hit us.

That was, of course, the tremor at six minutes past two o'clock that was recorded upon the seismographs. It shows how little credence one may give to one's own judgment of time, for I would have sworn it happened a full quarter of an hour earlier.

We were moving at a speed of perhaps twenty or twenty-five miles an hour. Suddenly the car lurched. I was thrown against the door of the motorman's control room and, at the same instant, the lights went out. Our train left the tracks and, with a tremendous crash of glass, the right side hit the wall of the tube. The motorman fell out of the door and sprawled over me. Some of the passengers screamed shrilly.

I had never before experienced a quake and my first thought was, “There has been a terrific explosion.” For a minute I lay upon the car floor, numbed in mind while my palsied limbs shook with the terror that

follows surprise. The sensation was exactly like that which I encountered more than once during the war, when an enemy bombing plane was overhead and when one could hear the swish of a high-explosive projectile before it hit the earth.

But the very blackness of the tube was as terrifying as the train's derailment with its accompaniment of wails from the injured. I knew now how a miner must feel at the moment when there is a disaster in the workings.

The motorman and much of the wreckage of the door had fallen upon me. He stirred and muttered: "God!" It was not profanity, but a prayer, as he said it. He was pulling himself to his feet when a second shaking of the earth threw him down again, his shoulder digging into my ribs. That was the jar at nine minutes past two o'clock.

"What's exploded?" I gasped.

"That ain't no explosion," he returned. "That's a quake. I was in one, once before."

Above our heads sounded a dull thud as the fronts of some buildings rocked and collapsed upon the pavement.

"Good-by, New York." The motorman found his feet and helped me up. "Come along with me," he ordered; "we got to get these people outa here, somehow."

"How?"

Behind us, in the wrecked cars, was bedlam.

He slid the front door open, unhooked the guard chains, and dropped down to the roadbed. "Come along," he ordered. "We'll go to the next station an' get us some oil lanterns. We can't do nothin' without a light."

I hesitated about stepping down into the black pit.

"You needn't be afraid of the third rail," he assured me. "The juice is off."

So I stumbled along behind him, more than once tripping on steel supports and columns that had been shaken from their places. We left the madhouse of the wrecked train behind and found ourselves in a silence as oppressive as a tomb. Once he fell upon a girder and I stumbled over him.

As we regained our feet, I noticed a hissing sound.

"What's that?" I asked.

In another moment, I knew. I could smell the sweetish, sickish odor of illuminating gas. The motorman sniffed the air.

"Broken gas main," he said shortly. "We got to hustle if those poor devils have a chance, back there." He broke into a shuffling run. "Hurry," he urged.

We stumbled on. I was trying to breathe as little and hurry as fast as possible. Ahead of us something

roared, like an approaching express train. I realized it was not, just as I instinctively thought to flatten myself against the wall to let it pass. It was the sound of water; it was a deluge of water, pouring into the tunnel like a huge cascade. His feet hit the water first. I heard him splashing.

“There's a dip at the station,” he called a final warning. “You'll have to swim for it.”

In another second I was waist-deep in the flood. It hit me like a wave. A second wave lifted me from my feet and I stretched out my arms to swim with a purely instinctive motion of self-preservation. A third wave engulfed me. I felt myself drawn back into the deadly cave from which I was escaping. I swallowed a mouthful of salt water, strangled, gasped, sank. Then my knee hit a rock. Half walking, half swimming I felt a concrete step and above it, a picket fence.

The subterranean deluge had tossed me, like driftwood, upon the platform of the Fifty-first Street subway station.

I never knew what became of the motorman who saved my life by leading me from that wrecked train. Perhaps, with his better sense of direction, he may have reached the platform and escaped. It is more likely that the wave which lifted me up to safety carried him back into the tube.

I clung to the iron pickets, moving along them until I reached an open exit gate. I waded past the deserted ticket-seller's booth to the steps and crawled, on my hands and knees, up to the street level. My teeth were chattering from the chill of the water.

From the moment of the first shock, when our train left the track, I had been in the most oppressive darkness I have ever known. It was like the interior of the closest room on the darkest night. It was a kind of blackness that weighs one down beneath it. Compared to the tube, Lexington Avenue was light, although there was no moon, no streetlights and no lighted houses. Only the myriad of clear, peaceful stars gleamed overhead. About me, Lexington Avenue was deserted. Looking northward, toward Harlem, I could see an indistinct mob of fugitives crossing the street. They seemed to be moving toward Park Avenue.

Between the spot where I stood and the Kelton where I lived, three blocks below, the street was half-filled with debris; fronts of buildings had crumbled out, effectually blocking all traffic. Under my feet, in the subway from which I had escaped, I could hear the water hiss and boil. At first I wondered where the flood had come from and then I suddenly remembered the tubes to Brooklyn and Long Island. They must have opened during the quake, allowing the river water to surge into the tunnels.

I realized that I must find Mary and her mother, take them to some place of safety, if, indeed, any such spot existed upon the tortured earth. Other refugees have mentioned the same paralyzing experience: the thought that any calamity so tremendous must have been shared by every inhabitant of the globe.

Before I reached the hotel, another shock made me reel in my tracks. That was the final disturbance, recorded at forty-seven minutes past two o'clock, although it does not now seem possible that I was a half-hour in extricating myself from the subway.

Weakened, giddy, I fell in the street. Building fronts and stone cornices, that had been loosened by the former shocks, crashed to the pavement. Before my very eyes the outer wall of a building rocked and slowly, majestically, crumbled into a heap.

A room on the fourth floor was left exposed. In it a baby-grand piano hung precariously poised upon the very edge of the sagging floor.

As I have said, there was no sound or sign of human life near me. I might almost have been in one of those dead cities, like Pompeii, whose ruined dwellings are peopled only by ghosts.

The open doorway of the hotel was partially blocked by carved stone decorations which had fallen from the façade at the sixteenth floor. One huge block had crashed through the pavement into the subway tunnel, leaving a black, gaping hole in which the water gurgled.

The menace of that hole made me dizzy. I crawled around it upon my hands and knees, afraid that I would be seized by vertigo and tumble in. I dragged myself into the lobby.

Arthur Crown, the hotel accountant, was sitting there, quite at his ease. Except for him, the entrance was deserted. He had a candle for light, stuck upon a telephone table, and he was smoking a cigarette.

“Hello, Mr. Tennay,” he called, waving me to a chair as casually as if he had been going to chat about the baseball games or the weather. “Have a smoke.” He looked more closely. “Good heavens, man, what happened to you? You’re half drowned.”

“Subway,” I gasped, steadying myself against the table. “I was in a train that—was wrecked. The gas came in, then the water. I swam. They were all drowned.” The horror of it all was strongly upon me. “They all drowned—a whole train full. All drowned.”

He nodded understandingly.

“Sit down,” he insisted. “We’re safer here than anywhere else. Skyscrapers like this are the only buildings that haven’t been damaged. I tried to tell the guests that,” he added as if it were a cause for personal grievance on his part, “but they wouldn’t stay here. Everybody ran for the open.”

“Where did they go?”

“Search me!” Crown shrugged his shoulders. “Do sit down.”

“No, thanks.” Then I made the silliest speech of which I ever was guilty. “Please get my bill, Mr. Crown. I’m leaving.”

Crown threw back his head and laughed until he was forced to wipe the tears from his eyes. When he was able to speak, he replied:

“You’re not checking out tonight, are you? I hope you’re not displeased with our service.” He doubled up with another burst of laughter.

The sound of his mirth brought me to my senses as nothing else would have done. I grinned sheepishly and looked about the lobby. An elevator was wrecked in the shaft; chandeliers had fallen; all the elaborate furnishings were in confusion, covered with plaster and plaster dust.

“It’s Miss Hull, the girl I’m engaged to,” I explained. “We just became engaged tonight. I must find her.”

“Sure.” Crown pointed to my dripping garments. “Better change your clothes, though. And if you have a gun, take it with you. They’re looting already. Here, take this candle.” He lighted a fresh taper from his own and passed it to me.

“Let's see,” he added; “your brother checked out, didn't he?”

For the minute I had forgotten Matt.

“That's good.” Crown said it heartily. “He must have gotten clear of the city before it happened.”

The steel stairs were not harmed. I climbed to my room on the eleventh floor. Slowly I regained a hold upon myself. I stripped off my wet clothes, dressed in my warmest outing suit. I stuffed my money and a few trinkets in my pockets, loaded my old army automatic pistol and fastened it, in its holster, to my belt.

When I attempted to wash my hands, I discovered there was no water. A long time after then we learned how the dams had burst at the artificial lakes. The flood that followed is an epochal story in itself. There was a little drinking water left in my pitcher. I took a long swallow and filled a pint bottle to carry with me.

“So you're off?” Crown asked, when I returned to the lobby.

I nodded.

“Help yourself to cigarettes.” He pointed to the disordered corner that had been the cigar case.

I blew out the candle and put the stub in my pocket.

“Good luck to you!” Crown shook hands. “I hope you find her—safe. Remember, if there are any more shocks, the new buildings are the safest.”

“Are you left here all alone?” I asked.

“There may be some people up in their rooms,” he replied, “but I guess they all went out in the panic. It was unbelievable here, then. They wouldn't listen to reason. Well, as I said, 'Good luck!'”

I walked confidently around the hole in the pavement, which had unnerved me when I entered. Overhead, the stars were shining peacefully.

CHAPTER II.

Lexington Avenue was, as I have said, littered with wreckage. I could see no living creature on it. It seemed as if a whirlwind must have accompanied the earthquake and, like a mammoth vacuum cleaner, swept up the thousands of men, women

and children who had lived along the street. Above Fiftieth Street the old stone and brick buildings that had so long been a disgrace to the neighborhood were almost entirely leveled, crumbled by the repeated shocks. Some walls had tumbled into the cellars while others had spilled over, like children's blocks, upon the pavement.

Mary Hull's apartment was on the other, the west side of the city. I went toward Park Avenue without the slightest premonition of the difficulties I was to encounter. It seemed a simple matter to walk those eleven blocks that separated my hotel from her apartment house.

Indeed, it was a strange betrothal night; an improbable, incomprehensible and yet a fascinating experience. Less than three hours had passed since Mary promised to marry me and I felt that I had lived through a week of terror.

Minutes and yards are sometimes inadequate standards for measuring time and distance. Like Stanley, one may be able to throw a stone across a chasm and spend a month in reaching the spot where the pebble landed. Or one may crowd into a single evening the adventures of a normal lifetime.

My toe struck something soft and yielding that lay upon the pavement. I bent over and lighted a match for the starlight was insufficient illumination to permit me to discover what this object might be. It was the body of a man, face down upon the asphalt, the first of many bodies that I passed. In the man's arms was a paper-covered bundle, containing his most treasured possessions, I suppose, which he had been carrying when a bit of stone rolled down from a roof and pinned him beneath it. I shivered and went on.

At first glance I thought the sumptuous apartment houses along Park Avenue had scarcely been harmed. "Bond Boulevard," my brother Matt always called those multiple palaces. They were standing, having survived the crash in all their brick and stone magnificence. But a closer view showed the havoc that had been wrought. Like Lexington, Park Avenue was deserted. Whole sections of the pavement and sidewalk had dropped into the underground passage that lay beneath the street, the tunnel through which the New York Central trains passed to the Grand Central Station. These yawning holes were gigantic mantraps; for from them came the roar and hiss of surging water, showing that the passage had been flooded as well as the subway tubes.

For a minute, I thought it would be impossible for me to cross. However, I discovered that steel girders and even some sections of pavement remained to bridge the street. Upon my hands and knees, I crawled along a ragged steel beam to the center of the street, where a whole block of reinforced concrete had remained in place. There I stood, resting, while I looked up and down the thoroughfare, hoping to see one other survivor. In fact, I had begun to wonder if Crown, seated in the hotel lobby, and I were not the only residents of New York left alive.

High up, perhaps on the tenth floor of an apartment hotel a block below, a flickering candle had been placed in a window. Beside it a dark figure leaned upon the window sill, peering out at the desolation. I was seized with a fever to speak to someone.

"Hullo, there," I called. "Hullo, there!"

The figure—it might have been either a man or a woman—withdrawed the candle and closed the window, evidently frightened by my hail.

In order to reach the opposite curb, it was necessary for me to crawl along the jagged steel beams, the skeleton of the street. As I neared the west sidewalk, I slipped and, for a breathtaking second, I hung above the black hole of the tunnel. The water below seemed to rise up like a living monster, to seize me. My left hand was cut on a sharp steel point, but I hung on and managed to go forward.

The cross street on which I found myself at the end of this perilous journey was made impassable also by holes in the pavement. But I was able to make my way along, avoiding both the holes and the piles of stone and brick. In an open doorway of a shop, stood a little dog. He quivered with fright, even as he growled to warn me away from the stock he was guarding.

Between two large holes in the pavement, pinned in its place by a small avalanche of rubble from a building front, stood a large limousine. Five men and three women were seated in it, all of them wearing

evening dress as if they were driving home from the opera. Two of the men sat in the chauffeur's and footman's places, the others were in the rear. All of them were smoking but not speaking. It was obvious that the car could not move. They watched me with intent curiosity as I passed them.

A man, running at top speed, turned the corner

of Madison Avenue and almost knocked me down as he bumped into me. He was without hat or coat and wore neither collar nor tie. In his right hand he carried a number of bills which he grasped by the middle, crumpling them up as many craps shooters do in the excitement of a game. He solemnly handed me one of the bank notes.

"I'm a stranger here," he announced breathlessly. "Can you tell me the best way to get out of the city?"

"Good heavens, man, I don't know that myself." I returned his money.

Plainly, he did not comprehend my reply.

"These damn foreigners don't understand English," he grumbled. Then, turning, he ran away from me, retracing his steps toward Madison Avenue. I followed him.

I found Madison Avenue still passable, although greatly littered with brick and stone, glass and stucco. No cars were to be seen on it and, in fact, no street in Manhattan was open for automobile traffic. The only machines I saw stood wrecked or abandoned at the curbs.

Madison had become the route of many fugitives, all of them moving southward, toward the lower end of Manhattan. I joined this throng and walked with them until near Forty-second Street we found our passage blocked by a twisted heap of steel and a great monument of stone that had been catapulted down. We turned westward through Forty-third Street toward Fifth Avenue.

One man who walked through that block beside me did not seem content, as the others were, to shuffle along silently with his eyes on the ground.

"Went up to Central Park," he observed, in a colorless monotone of a voice. "Couldn't get in. Dunno where to go."

"You couldn't get in Central Park?"

"Nope." His words came as if he had memorized them and was now repeating them in his sleep. "There ain't no room to stand in Central Park, now."

"You mean that there are so many people in Central Park that one can't find a place to stand?"

"Yes. An' when women faint, people walk on 'em. One girl didn't, though. There wasn't room for her to fall down. So she didn't get walked on."

Our crowd halted. I climbed up a pile of debris that stood on the site of a building and looked over Fifth Avenue. Then it was possible for me to believe what he had told me about Central Park.

No spectacle like that march up Fifth Avenue has ever before been staged for human eyes to witness. As far as I could see the great traffic artery was packed solid with a moving mass of human beings. They filled the street from curb to curb, without a break. Because of fallen material and stones, they could not

swarm over the sidewalks.

This was not a mob, in the sense that the word is usually used. Rather it was a muster of all humanity, pouring out of every street, from every house, flat and rookery. It crawled uptown at a sick snail's pace, never quite halting, never really moving. It seemed to me like a river of cooling lava, almost congealed but forced onward by the infinity of pressure pounds behind it.

It was a tremendous parade of the helpless, and of the hopeless, a mighty accumulation of individuals who had reached that crisis of despair when words are impossible. These tens of thousands had been stricken dumb by their common misfortune.

Downtown New York was emptied into that one street, taking part in the pageant of wretchedness and fear. "Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief, doctor, lawyer, merchant, chief"—all were there, rubbing elbows as they toiled along.

I did not know how to cross that river of fugitives. It was more terrifying than any physical barrier. The individuals in it looked neither to the right nor left, but plodded on. Before my eyes, almost close enough so that I might have helped him, an old man stumbled. He could not rise. The column moved on, grinding out his life beneath it.

I took a deep breath, as if I were about to dive into ice water.

"Excuse me. Let me through," I shouted.

No one heeded me. Hemmed in, with men and women so close that their bodies pressed against mine, I was carried along with them.

For a minute I was stupefied. Then I went mad, like an animal caught in a thicket. I felt certain that I would be sucked under by this human ebb tide. I used my fists, my knees, my hands and fists. I fought my way through, inch by inch, always remembering the old man who had fallen and then been unable to rise; recalling how quickly the gap had closed up over him.

Those persons who walked in that nightmare silence made no complaint as I struggled. By the time I had landed on the west curb, they had carried me six or seven blocks toward Central Park with them.

I staggered into a side street which was deserted. On either side the old, brownstone residences had suffered considerably. Outer walls had fallen, leaving rooms exposed like stage settings. In the street was a cloud of plaster dust that burned one's eyes and partially obscured the starlight. Halfway through the block, as I approached Sixth Avenue, a girl suddenly appeared in an areaway, stepping gingerly over the wreckage that lay on the sidewalk.

"Pardon me," she said.

I could see that she was young and beautiful. She wore evening dress; her bobbed hair was becomingly disordered, and a great jeweled, silver-snake bracelet was coiled about her upper arm.

I stopped.

"Please tell me your name." She asked it without the slightest hesitation or embarrassment.

“Alexander Tennay. And I live—I mean I did live at the Kelton.”

“Your occupation, please?” The girl smiled.

“I happen to be New York representative of the South Pacific Transportation & Trading Corporation.”

“Such luck!” announced the girl. She took my hand and led me upstairs toward a room where I could hear voices and laughter.

Although much plaster had fallen in the hall, showering the dark woodwork and wainscoting with a white, volcanic dust, although the great glass chandelier had fallen, breaking the newel post and littering the floor with fine bits of glass, one could sense that the house belonged to and was occupied by people of wealth and good taste. At the top of the stairs, my pretty guide threw open a door and led me into a candle-lighted room.

From the shadows beside a piano, two girls came forward into the circle of light. One, blond like my guide, was evidently her sister. The other, a strikingly dashing brunette, seemed vaguely familiar. Two men also rose to greet me.

“Permit me!” began my guide. “Listen, everybody! May I present Mr. Alex Tennay, of the South Pacific something or other. Anyway it sounds interesting.” She turned to me. “My sister, Alice van der Kel. I’m Julia.” Instantly I remembered their identity. They were the daughters of an old Knickerbocker family whose names and photographs had been spread over pages of Sunday newspapers two years before, when they renounced society to become glorified dancers in a Broadway revue.

“This is Georgianna Lee.” The dark girl nodded. I had seen her only two nights before. She was the prima donna of a popular light opera. I bowed. “Franz Erk, the composer,” Julia continued. We shook hands. She pointed to the remaining man. “Cecil Henry.”

“Having all confessed our right names,” Georgianna said with a little burst of silver laughter, “let’s get down to a little serious-minded drinking.”

“But I—I can’t stop,” I murmured.

“Why?” demanded, Julia.

“I’m looking for someone, one of my friends.” For some unknown reason I hesitated to say my fiancée. “They live over on the West Side. I’m on my way there.”

“Bet you a hundred she’s not at home,” said Georgianna, while the others roared with laughter.

Erk took a bottle of champagne from a bucket of ice and water. He poured some of the wine into each of six glasses, then filled them up to the brim with anisette.

“Quicker action,” he explained. “We’ll have to drink the wine first anyway, because our ice won’t keep.”

“Thank goodness,” said Georgianna. “I can get tight without worrying over tomorrow’s matinee.”

Julia and I were sitting on a cushioned window seat.

“I can't stay here, child,” I protested. “I must go. Damn it, I've got to find my friends.”

“Of course you'll stay. You won't be able to find anybody. You'll just make yourself unhappy searching for them,” Julia dismissed the matter. “After the show tonight,” she continued, “Georgianna and the boys came up here for a drink. We were all talking when”—she shivered slightly—“it happened. My friend, Carl—Carl Watkins, you know—ran out.” It was a minute before she finished her story. “Some of the wall fell. His body's there, on the steps, under those stones. I ran down after him so—I saw it.”

Her breath came quickly, then she recovered and finished in quite a matter-of-fact tone: “Then I saw you coming and—and you looked so alone, too, so I brought you up. We thought, if we all stayed together, we wouldn't be so—frightened.” Her voice broke.

“You don't understand.” I made a final, weak

protest. “I must find my friend. You see, it's the girl I'm engaged to.”

“But you won't find her. You'll be lost or crushed in the street. It's hopeless. Isn't it better to stay here—among friends than be trampled down out there? Here, at any rate, we can be gay tonight, even if there is no tomorrow.”

Someone struck a chord upon the piano.

“No tomorrow. No tomorrow,” the girl repeated. She must have recognized the composer's touch upon the keys for she did not look up to see who was playing. “The idea stimulates Franz just as it does me. Listen. He's improvising.”

I surrendered to her logic. After all, she was right. There would be no tomorrow. It was better to meet the end with gayety here, than to be trampled under the feet of fear-maddened fugitives. How could I hope to find Mary?

The piano rumbled with a peculiar kettle-drum syncopation done upon the bass. Then it picked up a thread of melody, set in strangely harmonious Negroid minors. Twice the composer played it through, to fix it in his memory.

Then he repeated the kettle-drum introduction and sang:

“Angel Gabriel's a-comin' to the earth.

Listen to the trumpet of the Lord.

Gabriel's a-blowin' now for all he's worth,

Trumpetin' the Gospel an' the Word.

“Blow, Gabriel—

As th' world is mendin', Gabriel,

As th' world is endin', Gabriel,

As the Lord is sendin', Gabriel,

“Blow, Gabriel—

Your chilluns is collected;

Your summons is expected:

Hark to the Word of Israel.”

The first time he sang it mockingly, inventing words to fit the irresistible beat of the melody. Then, as the words became fixed in his and our minds, he chanted it again with all the fire and spirit of a camp-meeting convert. It echoed through that house like the call to the judgment seat.

“Play something else,” implored Georgianna, “or leave that piano alone.”

It recalled me to my senses. I rose to my feet.

“What’s the matter?” Julia pleaded. “Don’t mind Franz’s music. He has fits like that.”

“Sorry!” I said. “I really must go on.” I said good-by and hurried down the stairs and out into the street. I carefully avoided stepping on the heap of stones and bricks beneath which Julia’s friend, Carl, was buried.

In spite of the fact that Sixth Avenue was littered with the wreckage of the elevated line, many refugees were moving along it, a crowd that had eddied back from the congestion near Central Park. I was caught in this human maelstrom and carried along to Fortieth Street before I could free myself. I found Broadway nearly impassable, with great holes in the pavement above the subways. It was with considerable difficulty that I crossed Broadway and Seventh Avenue.

Outside the entrance of the Herald-Tribune building a man was seated on a stone, fixedly regarding the people who passed and repassed near him. There was something familiar about his posture. I walked closer and recognized the man. He was Tom McKay, with whom I had worked in my own reporter days. He had become a sort of night-wire editor for his paper’s news service.

“Hello, Tom.”

“Why, it’s Alex Tennay.” He shook hands as casually as if we had met in the Newspaper Club. “How’s Alex?”

“What are you doing here?” I demanded.

“I’m thinkin’,” Tom groaned. “Hell! Imagine a story like this breakin’, and here I can’t print it or even put it on the wire. Just my luck! I’d like to file ten thousand words. The whole damn world is waitin’ an’ I’m burnin’ to tell ‘em an’ I can’t even get a bulletin out.”

“Come with me, Tom,” I suggested. “We’ll try to get out of the city and we’ll find a wire, somewhere.”

“Naw!” He shook his head emphatically. “Got to stay here. Maybe some of the staff’ll show up. If they do, I’ll set ‘em to work. I got one fellow in there now, writin’ the lead.” He jerked his thumb toward the interior of the building. “I’ll try to send the first story out by messenger, if I can find a boy. With a story like this breakin’,” he grumbled, “I ought to have a full staff.”

“I'll take your story with me, if you like. I'm going to get out of the city.”

Tom's face lighted.

“Honest? Then wait a minute.” He ran inside, reappearing shortly with some ragged sheets of copy paper. “Here's a lead an' about two thousand. Mark it 'follow' and file it as soon as you can.”

I stuffed the manuscript into my pocket. Tom

slapped my back in hearty good nature.

“Think of it, Alex! What a head you could put on a story like this. A two-line streamer of hundred-forty-six-point type:

“MILLIONS DIE IN MANHATTAN!

“You wouldn't ask for anything nicer than settin' up a page like that.”

“Millions dead? Your praiseworthy desire for alliteration is getting the best of you, Tom.”

“Sure. There must be.” Tom indignantly defended his own estimate of the casualties. “Why, everybody's dead that lived below Bleecker Street and the last shock took all those that were left, up to Fourteenth.”

“You don't mean—”

“Didn't you know? The lower end of the island's sunk. It went right down into the drink at the second shock. At the time of the third shock, it crumbled off clear up to Fourteenth. Think what that means. World's greatest financial district and the most congested tenements in the world, all at the bottom of the harbor. I want to do parallel stories; one dealing with the human loss and one about the financial district. Biggest gold reserve in history is hundreds of feet under water. Huh! They'll find a new kind of fish in the stock exchange.” His voice rose to a thin, treble whine. “I ask you! Is it right? I can't send a word of it.”

I could scarcely believe the news.

“Are you sure?”

“Of course I am. I've talked with people who saw it. The fellow who's writing this went to look for himself. He nearly got caught. By the way, where were you when it happened?”

I told him how I had been trapped in the subway.

“Then you better add a few hundred words of description to the story,” Tom directed. “Don't forget. And send it off as soon as you can. Every press on the map is waitin' for it. Good-by, Alex.”

Before I was out of earshot he called after me.

“Don't forget to put on our copyright line.” I waved my arm to reassure him.

Tom McKay cared little what the news might be. It was his job to collect and distribute it, impersonally as an archangel. A million dead was, to him, a mere matter of type, a hundred-and-fortysix-point

streamer, in the same way as an automobile accident meant a short paragraph on an inside page.

With comparatively little more trouble, I reached the luxurious apartment house on West Forty-fifth Street where Mary Hull and her mother lived. I was relieved to see that, relatively speaking, it was undamaged. I slipped in the wrecked doorway and, after lighting several matches, found the staircase. As I climbed to the sixth floor, I wondered if all my efforts had not been futile. Almost everyone had sought safety in the open air. Hours had passed since the shocks.

But Mary Hull was calm, clearheaded and intensely practical. Moreover, she was responsible for the safety of her invalid mother. Except as a last resort, I was sure she would not have exposed the older woman to the excitement and the dangers of the street.

I reached the door of their suite and rapped. There was no sound. My heart sank. After the spectacles I had witnessed upon the streets, I realized how little chance there was that I would ever see them again. I then attempted to force the door, thinking I would leave a note for them, in case they returned.

“Who's there?” came in a man's voice which I recognized as Bob Wiston's.

“Alex—Alex Tennay.”

“I knew he'd come. I knew he'd come!” Mary's tone expressed infinite relief.

The door swung open. The room behind it was as dark as the hall where I was standing. Wiston seized my arm and drew me inside, while Mary quickly closed the door.

“I'll light a candle. I brought one,” I told them.

“We don't dare,” Mary protested. “It isn't safe. There are men about the building who are looting. We've heard terrible things and once they tried to come in here.”

I struck a match and lighted the candle stub. Then I flipped back my coat and showed them the butt of my pistol. The lighted candle put everyone more at their ease. Wiston lighted a cigar and the atmosphere seemed less tense.

“When did you come?” I asked Wiston.

“Immediately after the second shock. I was at the club and I ran here, intending to get my car and drive them to a place of safety. But as soon as I saw the streets, I realized how little driving we would do.”

“You've been sitting here in the dark ever since?”

“We wouldn't let him go out for a candle,” Mrs. Hull explained. “Those men are about.”

There was no use of distressing the women by telling them that the lower end of Manhattan was under water and that another shock might submerge the very district where we were. I insisted, and Wiston agreed with me, that it would be wise for us to walk north, until we reached the high rock ridge near Riverside Drive, the highest part of the island. Mrs. Hull said she felt strong enough to attempt the walk and that she was sure she would feel happier in the open air.

Although nothing was said about it, I sensed that both Mrs. Hull and Wiston had guessed Mary's and my understanding. Wiston, poor fellow, shook hands with quite unnecessary fervor and assured me I was

“damned lucky,” which I did not think applied solely to my escape from the perils of the flooded subway.

I told Mary and her mother to put on warm clothing and to collect their valuables. While they went in the bedroom to dress, taking the candle stub with them, I told Wiston in low tones what had happened to lower New York.

“It seems to me,” I concluded, “that our best plan is to get up to the higher part, in case there is another shock. Even if we cannot cross the Harlem River at One Hundred and Sixtieth Street, relief will eventually come from that direction.”

He assented.

“Anything's better than waiting here like this. We would have gone before, but Mary insisted that you might come.” He hesitated, and then added, “It would have been pretty tragic if you hadn't.”

Just then we heard a voice in the hall, outside the door. Wiston whispered the one word:

“Looters.”

“Bring that ax,” a man called. “Here's that door we couldn't open.”

“Did Mary lock it when she let you in?” queried Wiston, under his breath.

Evidently she had not, for as I rose, drawing my pistol and slipping off the safety catch, the first man spoke again.

“This door ain't locked now.”

The door opened, admitting two vague figures, both of them carrying electric torches which they turned full on me.

“Put up them dukes, you,” growled the first. “We're takin' up a collection for them that's rendered homeless by the quake.”

I fired before he finished his sentence. Although I am no crack shot, I was only ten feet away and one cannot miss at that distance. The heavy pistol barked like a cannon in the small room. I heard Mrs. Hull scream.

The man pitched forward, toward me, falling on his face. His electric torch, still burning, rolled across the floor, and under the table. The second man snapped off his light and the room was again plunged in darkness. I bent over to secure the flashlight.

That movement saved my life. The second man fired and the bullet crashed into the wall near the spot where my head had been. I lost my balance and fell heavily upon the body of the man I had shot.

Instantly the man in the doorway, believing he had killed me, turned his torch on Wiston.

“Don't you get fresh,” he warned Bob, covering him with his pistol.

He made a perfect target for me, as he stood there, his light in his left hand. I rolled half-over, pointed my pistol at him, and pulled the trigger. I was so close that the powder flame burned his coat and vest.

He stumbled, coughed and toppled over.

“Alex! Alex!” Mary called from the bedroom. “Are you hurt?”

“No.”

Then I saw the gleam of a moving bull's-eye of light in the corridor. Evidently other members of the gang were outside. I rolled over the bodies to the door and fired at the source of the light. Two shots replied. I fired again and heard the sound of men running down the stairs.

“It's all right, Mary,” I shouted to reassure her. Then I secured the torches that had dropped from the intruders' hands.

Bob armed himself with one of the looters' pistols, so that we would both be ready in case the gang returned. We dragged the bodies into the corridor, covering them with the blood-soaked rug from the living room, so that Mary and her mother would be spared the sight.

I scouted ahead for looters, while the others followed me quickly down the stairs.

It had been starlit night when I entered the building and when we emerged day was near. The stars were dimmed by a yellow flood in the east. A half twilight veiled the street. About ruined buildings hung a fog of plaster dust. Somewhere north and east, a great column of smoke was rising

upward.

But we found the street filled with water. I did not understand where it had come from but Bob Wiston was shrewder.

“I wonder if there will be another?” he whispered.

“Another what?”

“Another tidal wave.”

For the first time that night I really despaired.

CHAPTER III.

Daylight came slowly, as if the sun were reluctant to disclose the havoc and ruin which the night had partially obscured. As we reached the higher ground, where the flood of the tidal wave had not inundated the streets, the district seemed less like a city of the dead. There are no words in the language to describe the homeless, bewildered persons we met.

Our plans were vague enough. We knew that we hoped to reach the upper end of the island. There we thought we might find some way of crossing the Harlem River and reaching the mainland. But the people on the streets, moving about as they were in groups that varied in size from a dozen to a thousand persons, seemed to have no plan and, also, to have lost all sense of direction. By irregular routes they walked round and round the blocks where their homes had been.

As the light increased, we observed more details, noted some of the vagaries of the quake's action. Some blocks of stores and apartments were absolutely leveled. Nearby would be other sections, apparently built of the same material, which seemed to have escaped serious damage.

Eventually we were forced toward Broadway. There, in spite of the holes in the pavement, we were able to make more rapid progress, for we were less hindered by the crowds of fugitives.

We passed hundreds of abandoned perambulators and go-carts. Soon after the first shock parents had attempted to wheel their children and then, seized by a sudden terror, they had picked them up and carried them in their arms.

Near Fiftieth Street we found four men hammering with iron sledges upon a safe which they had dragged from the wrecked box office of a motion-picture theater. I held my pistol ready for service, but they paid no attention to us as we passed them.

I was impressed by the fact that almost every man we met needed a shave. I do not know why I should have observed it, but it stands out as one of the curious things I noticed. And I also noted that many women had clung to their vanity cases. Girls who were wearing only nightgowns, bathrobes and slippers—there were many such—seemed to have carried paint and powder in their hands as their only baggage.

Near Columbus Circle we noticed a sheet stretched tent-fashion over the sidewalk, between two heaps of stone that had fallen from a building front. As we came close to it, we saw a young woman resting under this frail canopy. She was nursing a small baby and, at the same time, perfectly oblivious to our presence, was lining her eyebrows and lips with black and red pencils that she took from her wrist bag.

On the crest of the hill, near Sixtieth Street, we halted and looked back.

Strangely enough, the skyline of Manhattan had suffered little change, that we could see. Most of the big buildings stood intact, although some of the curtain walls and most of the ornamentation and fresco work had been shaken down. Generally speaking, the steel-frame buildings in which the weight of the side walls, floors and roof is carried by steel posts, had suffered little harm. Older and lower buildings belonging to the type known as "wall-bearing construction" because the walls carry the weight of floors and roof, had almost universally collapsed.

Whenever the condition of the street permitted it, our little party walked four abreast. Bob Wiston and I walked on either side of Mrs. Hull, in order to help her as much as possible. Mary walked on my left. Through it all, she and her mother were perfectly composed. Mary, clear-eyed, her light hair scarcely disordered, her smile ready any time that I glanced at her, was wearing a tweed suit and square-toed walking shoes. In that costume she was chic enough to be bound for some pleasure excursion, instead of being in flight from a doomed city.

Mrs. Hull was marvelous. Although she had been a semi-invalid for years, and had been sheltered from every exertion, every anxiety, every care, she rose magnificently to the crisis. Not once did she complain.

Bob Wiston thought of breakfast. He turned us down a side street and made for a doorway. Over it

was a delicatessen sign. Instantly I realized that I was ravenously hungry. We found the doorway half-blocked with loose brick that had tumbled down from the wall above. Bob entered, with some difficulty, and passed out what provisions he could find to me. Others had been there before, it seemed.

The breakfast consisted of a jar of pickled lamb's tongue, a tin of tea biscuits, a cake of pimento cheese and several bottles of mineral water.

Mrs. Hull laughed at the assortment of food.

“A perfect breakfast. Exactly what I would order for myself.”

The mineral water, with a dash of whisky from Bob's flask, was a godsend. We had all of us been more conscious of thirst than of hunger and I was saving my pint of drinking water for an emergency later in the day. After we had eaten, we gave the food and water that remained to a foreign woman and her twin sons who had watched us with wolfish eyes.

To escape being involved in the mob near Central Park, we walked west. On a street corner, a uniformed policeman stopped us. His face was badly cut and there was a mass of congealed blood upon his tunic. In one hand he held his nightstick. In the other he carried an empty glass jug. At first, as he approached us, I thought he was insane.

“Know where there's any milk?” he demanded.

“No.”

“Or water?”

I shook my head.

“I got to get milk an' water,” he explained. “I got about thirty kids in there.” He pointed to the ruined front of a store that had been an automobile salesroom. “I got to feed 'em somehow an' they're cryin' thirsty now.”

Mary solved the problem.

“Did you try the soda fountain in the drugstore?”

Across the street, behind a hole in the pavement that marked the route of the subway, was the caved-in entrance to a neighborhood pharmacy. The policeman stared at it and then grinned.

“We might find somethin' there at that, miss.”

“Let mother rest for a few minutes,” Mary told us. “We'll try to find some food.”

Mrs. Hull sat down upon the curb. The policeman and Bob dragged a plank from a wrecked scaffolding and used it to bridge the hole in the pavement. I crossed, making my entrance into the store through the shop window. The others followed.

With a cry of delight, Mary unearthed several quarts of milk, a freezer of chocolate ice cream, a case of bottled water and soft drinks, a gallon of drinking water and added to this supply of rations the store's stock of malted milk and chocolate. The policeman beamed as he surveyed the food.

“Damn!” he remarked, with infinite satisfaction. “They'll think I'm goin' to throw a party for 'em.” He stepped to the window and bellowed: “Tim! C'm here, Tim.”

In answer to the hail, a city fireman appeared, taking the provisions as the policeman passed them out and carrying them across the street to the “nursery.”

“Tim's my nurse girl,” the policeman confided to us. “I was lucky to find him. Them kids has to have a lot of things done for 'em an' Tim's a married man. I ain't,” he added apologetically, blushing deeply out of respect to Mary. He confessed his bachelorhood as if he thought he had been remiss in his duty.

Meanwhile Mary had rummaged through the stock shaken from the shelves behind the prescription desk and located a first-aid pack. In spite of his protests, “Don't bother with me, miss,” she made the man sit down while she washed and dressed his wound. She must have tortured him when he applied the iodine, for the flesh had been literally stripped from his cheekbone. He sat there through it all, making no complaint.

“If I ever catch me the bozo who gimme this,” he promised, when she had finished, “that lad'll think he's met up with another quake. It was right after them first two shocks. I seen him throw an old feller an' a woman out of their auto. He pitched 'em out on the street an' was goin' to ride off by himself. I grabs him, but he up an' clocks me with a monkey wrench an' got away.”

“Where was that, officer?”

“Here on this corner, miss.” The policeman inspected the bandage, admiring it in the fragment of mirror that remained behind the soda fountain. “Say, you ought to been a doctor. Well, the boy must of knocked me out. When I come to, I had a fight with a mob on me hands. Then Tim come along. Since then, him an' me's been collectin' our orphan asylum. We got wops an' Jews an' Irish an' Polacks an' squareheads. An' there's some we ain't been able to classify.”

Mary quite frankly admired him.

“I think it was a wonderful thing for you and Tim to do.”

“Oh, no, miss.” He looked at her with blue-eyed wonder. “Somebody had to do it an' we was here. You'd be surprised, though,” he added, “how careless folks was with their kids last night.”

“What about your own relatives and Tim's wife and children?”

The policeman looked away.

“No use worryin' about them, except we'll have a Mass said. They lived way downtown below Greenwich Village an' they never had no chance to get out. It's all under water now.”

Bob Wiston took his card from his pocket and scrawled upon it the address of his firm in Chicago. He handed this to the officer.

“You're too good a man to lose track of,” Bob remarked. “Let me hear from you.”

We all shook hands.

“Good luck, officer.”

“Good luck to you and thanks, miss. I'll tell them kids that their party is on you.”

As I write, other memories of that morning's walk flood back upon me. The sun, red as the flames of a great fire in Harlem on our right, blazed down upon us.

The panic of the fugitives somewhat diminished. During the hours of darkness scarcely one person had spoken to another. Now they resumed speech and the wildest rumors flew from group to group with incredible speed.

On one corner, we heard that the entire Atlantic seaboard had been destroyed. Boston, Newport, Philadelphia were said to be razed. On the next corner, a woman was telling how the inland cities had suffered, even more than Manhattan. She said Chicago was swallowed up. Of course, there was absolutely no foundation for these tales. Manhattan had no means of communicating with the outside world since the first shock. Nevertheless, everyone seemed to believe the most improbable things.

Somewhere along our route we found the preacher. About a thousand men and women were gathered around him. He was an oldish, undersized man, wearing threadbare clothes and standing upon a heap of wreckage which had once been a house. His voice, shrill and penetrating, reached us perfectly on the outskirts of the crowd.

“Brothers, ye failed to heed the handwriting on the wall.” He spoke in a singsong chant. “So look about. See this great city destroyed for its wickedness. Yeah! Like Sodom it is cast down to perish. Ye have yet time to repent. We are not yet ripe grain for the sickle of the reaper.”

“Amen. Praise the Lord!” cried a man.

“Have a heed lest ye be pulled up with the tares, lest ye be cut down unrighteous in the flower of thy youth; lest, unwilling and unprepared, ye be summoned before the throne.”

“Amen. Amen,” several repeated.

“Brethren, this is the day of the Lord's harvest. Are ye ready to be judged?”

“No. I ain't ready to be judged. I ain't ready for the reaper.” A huge colored woman, the largest I have ever seen outside of a sideshow tent, called out her answer to the preacher's question. She made her majestic way through the crowd that parted before her, until she was close to the rubble that served as a pulpit. There she flung herself down. “Hear me, Lord. I ain't ready, Lord. I ain't fitten to be reaped.”

“Our sister seeks repentance,” shrilled the preacher. “Who is thereto repent with her?” He extended his arms imploringly. “Is there only one in all Sodom to be saved? Send us a sign, Lord. Send us a sign.”

He looked up to the sky, perhaps self-hypnotized into the belief that he would see a flaming chariot. My gaze followed his and, as it did, my ears caught a sound they had not heard for hours—the purring of a motor.

The roar of the motor grew louder. Then, from behind a banked eastern cloud, a great plane dived into view. A gasp of astonishment, almost of fear, went up from the preacher's congregation. As the plane came closer, I was thrilled to notice the United States Army markings upon wings and body.

“It's goin' to bomb us,” called some man who evidently believed he was back in a war zone.

The plane dipped over Central Park and from it fluttered down thousands of scraps of paper. Again and again the plane turned, climbed, dipped, like a hawk over a grain field. It seemed an age before it circled

near us and some of the sheets of paper quivered down in our vicinity. But long before they reached us, the flyer had disappeared, sailing toward Brooklyn.

There was a mad rush for the precious scraps. In spite of Mary and her mother's protest, I joined the milling thousands who were waiting with

outstretched hands to snatch one of the sheets from the air. One fluttered near. I jumped, seized it and fought my way back through the press of excited men to Mary and her mother. The preacher was forgotten. Bob displaced him on the rostrum and read the message aloud to the gathering:

EXECUTIVE PROCLAMATION

To the People of the City of Greater New York:

The nation joins me in sending you every possible expression of sympathy. The nation promises immediate and tangible aid. The calamity which you have suffered is without parallel in the history of mankind. It has shocked the world.

Relief work is being organized as this is written. To facilitate it, the officer commanding the military in the stricken area will enforce strict martial law.

Because of the unparalleled interruption of transportation, it may not be humanly possible for relief trains to reach you today. Remain calm. Remember that every resource of the government, the entire strength of the army and navy, the facilities of many corporations and private individuals are being taxed to supply your needs.

The proclamation, dated at Washington at four o'clock that morning, was signed by the President of the United States. I believe that those handbills, distributed by plane, did more real good than any other single item of the relief work.

The preacher attempted to resume his sermon. His words fell upon deaf ears.

Bob Wiston thought it would be wise for us to return to the apartment and wait there until aid arrived. But I insisted that, because of the shortage of food and water, our best plan was to push forward and meet the relief columns.

About noon we reached One-Hundred-and- Sixty-fifth Street. Looking down from the cliff, where the Polo Grounds had stood, we saw that the usually placid Harlem River that separates Manhattan from the mainland had been on a terrific rampage. The whole valley was strewn with wreckage. The tidal wave had swept between the cliffs, demolishing every structure that the quake had spared. Against the stone piers of ruined bridges, great heaps of driftwood had been piled.

Two miles above, at High Bridge, we could see a few adventurous men crossing from the New York to the Bronx bank, walking with comparative safety upon the wrecked boats, scows, houses, wooden piers and houseboats which the water had piled into a huge, misshapen heap. This was grounded upon the pier stumps and the ruins of the great stone causeway.

"There's our only chance to get across." Bob pointed to it.

"If those men can cross there," replied Mrs. Hull, "I think we can manage, too."

To understand how this river barrier had come into existence, one must imagine the miles of docks and shipping that stretched from the Brooklyn Heights district and the Battery on either bank of the East River, up past Welfare Island, to the entrance of the Harlem. Along these miles of water front, every scow, boat, yacht, many of the piers and storehouses themselves, had been snatched up by a moving wall of water that had risen like a tide in the lower Bay. Nothing quite like it was ever seen before. It must have been a magnificent spectacle when that huge wave concentrated in the upper reaches of the harbor.

As we approached the barricade on the High Bridge piers, the river had sunk back to its normal level, although a strong current held downstream, running from the Hudson River toward the Bay.

A wrecked ferryboat rested on the mud and rocks of the Manhattan bank. We climbed through it to the upper deck and from there managed to reach the top of the wreckage, fully fifty feet above the water.

“Giants have been playing jackstraws with our belongings,” said Mrs. Hull to Mary.

Beneath our feet, heaped up by forces whose power dwarfs man's comprehension, were huge harbor lighters. They might have been the knickknacks of a child's playroom, drifted to one end of a bathtub. Great timbers that had been piles and heavy planks were twisted by the pressure into fantastic shapes. It was something like a logjam, except that the component parts were larger than any logs. A half-dozen wooden freight cars, swept up from some railroad yard, were mere infinitesimal portions of the whole.

It was easy to see why more persons had not used the wreckage as a bridge. Every foot of progress from the west to the east bank meant climbing over barriers, all so slippery that we constantly risked a fall to the riverbed. Mary made her way without assistance. But Bob and I had to lift her mother bodily at times.

So we toiled across, paying no heed to shouts of “Look out there,” that came from a group of men on the bank we had quitted. Once I peered over the edge of the pile and thought I noticed the water

beneath us was running more swiftly.

A mangled yacht, quite a fine one, barred our path. It lay on its side but a jagged hole in the hull permitted us to crawl through into the cabin and up the companionway to the deck. There we let ourselves down on a mass of tangled planking and railroad ties. The last barrier was a sort of raft, perhaps a former floating wharf. As we were climbing up it I felt a movement beneath my feet. Startled, I looked upstream.

The tidal wave was returning.

The water had been sent up the Hudson River, between the palisades until it massed below the flats at Albany. Now the whole tremendous flood was sweeping back toward the sea. It was coming down the channel like a torrent that follows a broken dam. It was a great, swelling, racing tide that carried whole houses on its crest.

Even as I looked, a preliminary movement made the wreckage creak and groan. A higher wave was close behind. In another moment we would be swept away.

I took Mrs. Hull in my arms, shouted a desperate “Quick!” to Mary and Bob Wiston and climbed up the slippery timbers that were canted toward us. I missed my footing and fell heavily. Mrs. Hull was not injured. Mary and Bob helped me to my feet. We struggled on.

“Wait! Wait just a minute!” groaned Bob, as if he were pleading with a reasoning force. Tight-lipped and tense, Mary offered no protest or complaint.

Dirty, muddy, foam-specked water boiled up beneath our feet. The planks moved. A great snapping and screeching told of the strain upon the timbers.

The raft or platform was tilted at an angle of almost thirty degrees toward the center of the river. The flood poured over the top of the barricade. We stood helpless and I realized that we were lost.

Suddenly, as we were about to be drawn back into the maelstrom, the water raised under the outer edge. The whole mass of wreckage heaved. Our raft righted and then tilted forward, literally catapulting us across it and landing us, safe, upon the terraced platform of the parkway, above the site of the old High Bridge railroad station.

Just as we reached the secure footing of masonry and rock, the river seemed to mark us as its victims. Mary and Bob were a step in advance. I handed Mrs. Hull to them when the water rose and reached my waist. It would have sucked me downward, had not Mrs. Hull held the lapels of my coat with a tenacity and muscular strength one would not have dreamed was concealed in her thin white hands. For a moment we all tottered on the brink, then they dragged me ashore. As I turned to look back, the crest of the flood passed, carrying with it out to sea every stick of the great jam that had composed our bridge.

Exhausted by the physical and mental strain of those few tortured seconds, we sat down. It was some time before anyone spoke.

“Gosh,” Bob sighed, “that was a close connection.”

We all laughed hysterically.

We finished the whisky in Bob's flask and then walked slowly up the hill toward the Grand Concourse and the Boston Post Road.

Although the shocks had not been as severe in the Bronx as in Manhattan Island, the miles of apartment houses seemed to have suffered more than the buildings in downtown New York. Engineers say that this was due to improper methods of construction. In the main, however, the scenes were identical with those we had witnessed before. There were the same helpless, surging crowds of fugitives. As we approached a corner Mary seized my arm.

“Look!” She pointed to a message printed in chalk upon a wall of one of the few undamaged buildings. “There's your name.”

Someone had printed “Alex Tennay” there. Below my name was an arrow pointing out the Boston Post Road and below that the words, “Watch the arrows. About three miles.”

Uncomprehendingly, I stared at the message. I was the only Alex Tennay listed in the New York telephone directory, but I could not imagine who had this interest in communicating with me. A few blocks farther on, we saw the same message again.

We proceeded with no little difficulty through mobs that either stood listlessly in the street or moved to and fro in ceaseless, aimless wanderings. Then we heard traffic whistles. The people opened a road through the center of the street.

There was a long column of infantrymen, four abreast, route marching. The men were dirty, tired, sweating, burdened with full cartridge belts and packs from which protruded their packages of emergency rations. A wild, hoarse cheer went up from the refugees who lined their path. A first

lieutenant walked smartly at the head of the column. He kept calling out:

“Rations in the rear, folks. Rations in the rear.”

The regiment filed past, their colors cased as if they were moving into a war zone. Following them came an engineers battalion, with its train, their pontoons for bridges hauled by tractors. Next was a smart squadron of cavalry, preceding a complete field hospital. Then came miles of motor trucks, commandeered from corporations and private owners but manned by soldiers. The trucks literally groaned under the weight of supplies.

“You'll find a tent city and rolling kitchens up about four miles,” called the men.

It seemed that the column would never end. Behind the army units was a navy and marine relief train from the Boston Navy Yard. More soldiers followed them, with supply trains, artillery batteries, although the horses hauled loaded wagons instead of guns. It seemed like a view of troops pouring into a captured city.

When the final detachment had passed, we walked northward again. At frequent intervals we found the “Alex Tennay” message with the arrow pointing. In the late afternoon, I discovered the final guide sign. The name had been printed upon a board nailed to a tree and the arrow pointed down to a handsome closed car that was parked below it.

“There's my friend,” I remarked.

“I'm afraid he won't give us a ride,” Bob returned. “There are no wheels on that car.”

It was true. The wheels had been taken off and the car jacked up on piles of bricks.

“Maybe he thought you'd bring wheels with you,” Mary suggested.

I went closer. Two men were sleeping inside the car. My hand was upon the door before I realized the identity of one of them.

“Matt,” I shouted. “Matt!”

My brother sat up. The interior of the car was piled high with something that was covered by a blanket. He greeted us casually as if the meeting was the most natural thing in the world.

“Hello, folks!” Matt rubbed his eyes. He expressed no surprise at seeing us there together. With another person this matter-of-fact attitude might have been a pose. With him it was merely a logical conclusion of a natural phenomenon which he would no more question than he would a rainy morning in April.

“I waited around here,” Matt said, “because I thought maybe you'd like to run up to my farm for a few days. That is,” he grinned, “if you can spare the time from your offices.” He shook the man asleep beside him. “Wake up, 'Skinny.' Our gang's here.”

The companion, a youth I had never seen before, jumped down from his bed.

“Skinny hired out to pick apples for me,” Matt nodded at his helper. “I hired him between the second and third shocks, last night. After the train ran off the track at Peekskill.”

“Can't we get some wheels for your car?” Bob Wiston was plainly puzzled at Matt's attitude. He was not quite sure that Matt was sane.

“Of course, I have the wheels. I've been sleeping on them,” Matt hauled them out from beneath the robes. “I thought if we hid 'em, nobody would try to take this bus away from us. There's something discouraging in trying to steal a car without wheels. Skinny and I'll put 'em on while you eat. Then we'll get rolling.”

We ate soup, beans and hardtack at a cavalry rolling kitchen. Then I found a signal-corps telegraph and, for a small consideration, prevailed upon the sergeant in charge of it to send the news story which McKay had given me.

Matt explained the presence of the car.

“I met Skinny and hired him. Then we decided to come back from Peekskill and find you. The road was full of automobiles then. We were looking for a car when two fellows came along with this. They didn't look to me as if they owned it, so I stopped 'em and asked to see their license. They jumped out and ran away. So, seeing they'd abandoned it, I thought I'd take care of it for the real owner.”

By daylight, we had driven far out of the quake zone. About lunchtime we reached Mart's farm.

I slept nearly twenty-four hours. When I finally awoke, bathed, shaved and ate, my brother's housekeeper informed me that Mrs. Hull was resting comfortably, little the worse for her adventure. Bob Wiston, she said, had gone to Chicago on business.

“Where's Mary?”

“Your brother took her down to the packing house. They are loading a car of fruit and she wanted to see it.”

Mary was there, seated upon a nail keg,

watching Matt's skillful movements as he pressed and headed the barrels of apples which Skinny rolled to a waiting truck. There was nothing in the appearance of any of them to suggest that they had seen a city wrecked, the most complex civilization of the modern world destroyed.

“Why,” I exclaimed, “you're shipping out fruit.”

“Sure.” Matt's sardonic expression reminded me of the night before the quake, when he stood upon the hotel roof and told me how unimportant New York really was. “You didn't expect me to quit work because the New York market is gone, did you? People eat apples in other cities.”

He tightened the chime hoop.

“That's what I tried to tell you,” he added. “All the importance of New York, all your importance and the importance of your friends, existed in your mind.” Matt drove a nail. “It fooled others besides you.

Markets were all shot to the devil yesterday, but they've recovered today.”

“Matt says New York reminds him of the lady,” Mary interposed. “Few noticed when she died, but, ah, the difference to her.”

I said nothing. Matt tipped the barrel over for Skinny to roll away.

Matt began to head another barrel.

“It took an earthquake,” he announced, “to show you sophisticated people what we dubs knew. This country is so damned big that one New York more or less makes no difference.”

Down on the railroad track a train whistled for the crossing. Out on the highway, a milk truck rattled past. I picked up the morning paper, which Mary had glanced through. The headline caught my eye.

RELIEF ORGANIZED

NO PANIC IS FEARED

I did not stop to argue the point with Matt. The evidence was all on his side. I took Mary Hull's arm and led her back into the cool shadows of the packing house, where tiers of barrels concealed us from observation. I kissed her. It was our betrothal kiss, postponed for two days.

“Matt is wrong about the relative importance of things,” Mary whispered. “This is all that matters. Let's go back and tell him so.”

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