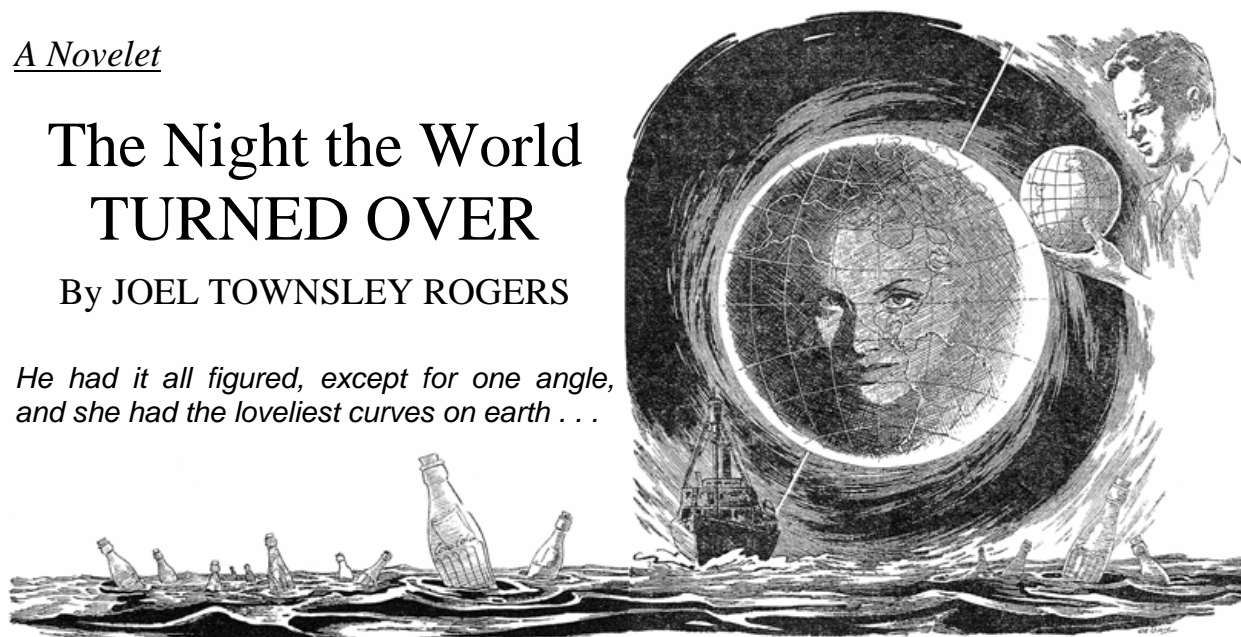


A Novelet

The Night the World TURNED OVER

By JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS

*He had it all figured, except for one angle,
and she had the loveliest curves on earth . . .*



I

THE needle was still oscillating moderately at eleven o'clock that night, as it had for the past month. The overturn was going to happen sometime in the next seventy-two hours, I was sure of it; but that was as near as I could say. My brain was fagged out from my computations. I decided to knock off and hit the sack.

The house-phone rang for me while I was in the shower. I turned the water off and reached for it. Celia's golden commanding voice, of course. From her penthouse seventy-eight stories above the street to me in the sub-basement.

"Lulu Lamartine the TV star is here with her roommate Dr. Habburat the anthropologist, Lowell," she said peremptorily. "Quit fiddling with your idiotic geophysical apparatus or cleaning out the garbage cans, or whatever you're doing, and come on up. We're all ravening for a game."

"What kind of a game, incomparably beautiful billionaire princess?" I asked, as if I cared.

"A cent a point, if you insist," she said. "You can certainly afford that much, with janitor's wages what they are. Particularly since contract is the one thing you're not too impossibly bad at."

"I play a fast game of two-handed tiddlywinks, too," I reminded her, from force of habit. "When all is said and done, it's still the king of indoor sports. Or queen, depending on your point of view. Why not let me give you a course of free instructions, Ceel? After all, you're scheduled to be twenty-five

come next ground hog day, and old enough for big girl games."

As if she would ever see her next birthday! Or anyone.

"Don't be so tediously male all the time, Lowell," she said disdainfully. "Your mind runs in a rut. Colonel Ames was supposed to make a fourth, but her adjutant phoned that she had to fly to Washington. It seems the gruesome Russians have just started all-out war."

"They chose a silly time for it," I couldn't help saying. "The big flop is going to happen in three days, at the outside. Or maybe hours. And where'll they be then, with their hundred thousand atom howitzers and eighteen million Ivans? Not to mention us, including your still unconceived of children."

"Oh, heavens!" she said. "A man and a monomaniac. You and your overturning earth. If there were anyone else at this hour. But at least you can shuffle. Look, the big war's started, can't you understand? Don't bother to dress. Just get on the elevator and come as you are."

"I'm in the shower, angel, with the large bronze mesomorphic map all lathered up from Spitzbergen to Tierra del Euego," I told her. "May I take time to de-suds myself and grab a towel?"

"Of course. Don't be so technical all the time, Lowell," she said. "Put on your dungarees or something. Really, I'm quite sure you're not so unique a specimen as you'd like to think, in your male conceit."

"I know," I said a little tiredly. "There are a billion two hundred and eighty-three million males on the planet, all alike. Illustration 1, page 19, Introductory Biology for the Eighth Grade. But there are a billion four hundred and ninety-six million females. Why did I have to latch my libido onto you?"

"Why, indeed?" she said. "Go find yourself some other one of the billion and whatever. Any other. It's obviously what your system needs, for some reason that's beyond me. So far as I'm concerned, if you were the last man on earth—"

"Don't say it," I begged her. "It makes me feel inferior."

"We've just cut for partners," she told me. "Habburat and I are playing north and south against Lamartine and you. After the first rubber we'll switch over."

"Quite possibly we shall. With a swoosh."

"Really, if you're going to keep harping—"

"No," I said. "I'm only half a harp. The other half is Greek, Polack, Scots and Cherokee. You're right—what difference does it make? Hero diddled while the earth turned over, and we might as well play bridge. Or did she swim the Hellespont? My brain's a little mixed tonight. Okay, boss. I'll be up."

"Don't bring your free ambidextrous theatrical passes with you, either, Lowell," she said. "We want to play bridge. Period."

I NEEDLE-SHOWERED the soap off, and toweled myself, put on a white sport shirt, slacks, and rope-soled espadrilles. I looked at the apparatus dial while I combed my hair.

The needle was still moving with its slow rhythm. Nothing final yet. But on the graph the latest peaks and valleys seemed to have become a little more pronounced, and closer together, even in the last eight or ten minutes.

Beneath my feet I seemed to feel a straining and a trembling deep in Manhattan's profound rock. But that might have been auto-suggestion.

My lab table was covered with yellow sheets of equations. Earth still spinning on its wobbling way. Spinning fast towards doom.

If it was going to be tonight, I might as well be playing bridge as sleeping. At least alone. I took the penthouse elevator up.

Seventy-Seven Tower, on the northwest corner of 77th Street and Central Park West, was a strictly

female joint, or haunt, or whatever is the word for it. Seventy-seven stories, not counting Celia's penthouse, with ten super-efficiency apartments to the floor, inhabited exclusively by the top grade of successful business and professional girls. Allowing an average of one and three-sevenths per apartment—that made eleven hundred babes, plus Celia. But try to make just one of them yourself.

I don't say that Seventy-Seven's tenants were all man-haters. They just didn't see any particular necessity for the species. They were all self-sufficient gals who had jumped into the upper pay brackets early—which is about a hundred times as easy for a good-looking girl in New York as for a man of any age. With all the big-dough careers they'd monopolized, they hadn't any yearning to start buying haircuts for some male goof who might not even be a good cook.

The doormen and desk clerks and dining-room captain and house dicks and the cigar counter attendant were all girls. The furniture slipcovers all buttoned on the left-hand side. Even the plumbing fixtures had strictly female threads. No men visitors were allowed except in the small guest-parlor off the downstairs lobby, furnished with a couple of straight-backed chromium chairs, a mezzo tint of the leaning tower of Pisa, and a stuffed peacock with a silly leer in his astigmatic glass eyes.

The only males in the building for the past month, in fact, were a moth-eaten bull rat which had staggered into my quarters one early morning along the sewer pipes from a Harlem brewery and a small frightened cockroach which I had been summoned to exterminate in the shower of Miss Diane Starbuckle, Vassar '51, (the Sheer Daintees model in 67F). I had picked him up by his whiskers and flushed him down the can, on his way to the wide free sea and the Coney Island beach—and then there was me, myself, I, moi, yo, Don S. Lowell, Esq.

II

MY PRESENCE, unlike that of Mr. Fields, my only pal and foxhole buddy until a sleek young doe rat with a saucy tail had lured him away into the darkness of the sewers, and Tom the peeping cockroach who had aspired too high, was due strictly to biological necessity. I mean you can have girl doormen and headwaiters, even cooks; cowboys and aviators, cops, wrestlers, admirals and

presidents. But there never was a babe born yet who wanted a career in a rat-ridden cellar.

I was the six-foot hundred-and-ninety pound hairy-chested skeleton in the basement—Lowell the janitor, the essential subterranean male. Keeping the heat and hot water going, the automatic elevators, incinerators and dynamos, and taking care of the leaky washers, dripping radiators, the overflowing bathtubs and the stuck floating balls was my mission in life.

The job had come to me after the Natural History Museum had been torn down five months before to make way for Seventy-Seven. I had been in charge of the Planetarium, and one fine February morning had found myself smothered among the fallen Pleiades and the crashing bricks. I hadn't read the newspapers, I guess, to learn that Celia had taken over.

There not being any big boiling demand for astrophysicists, I had sold her real-estate holding corporation's personnel department on the idea that I was a natural for the janitorial post in the new Tower. Maybe I did put a canary in my voice and intimate that I'd had mumps during adolescence. But I'd needed the job, being fond of my daily beans. Then, too, it had seemed something just to be beneath the same roof with her again, even though separated by seventy-eight steel-beamed and concrete floors.

Little Celia Powers! No more than a dozen years ago she had been a curly-haired saucer-eyed twelve-year-old. She'd lived in the second-floor flat under ours which was above the Old Dickens Bar on Tenth Avenue, down in Hell's Kitchen. Though I had been fifteen myself, and a senior at Tech High, I'd been nuts about her even then.

She'd had it, from the youngest age, even before she had started filling out with that shape like all the babes in the Steve Canyon comics. Just to look into her big boo eyes, you would want to flap your arms and fly or go around looking for some dragon to smack.

Still this angel knew all the angles. Her old man, old Bunghole Powers, had run the Old Dickens and been his own moistest customer. She had to learn the score. Beneath her Bo-Peep curls, behind her large dewy African-violet gaze and dimpled smile, she had a mathematical calculator for a brain quicker at figuring out sixteen simultaneous variables than the whole hundred-ton electronic computer at Harvard.

She hadn't wasted any more time than the law required with formal education. She had started as a junior office-girl with the eminent old Wall Street house of Witzheimer and Company at twenty-two dollars a week. That had been at the end of World War II, with the market surging up and down in waves. In three months she had become the firm's leading trader. By 1949, when she was twenty-one, she was Witzheimer and Company.

Celia had acquired the site for Seventy-Seven the previous winter, when New York City had met with a series of uncalculated disasters—when the six East River bridges cracked and buckled for causes not explained, and the main aqueducts shifted underground. The addition of half a million new arrivals to the relief rolls in the month of January alone, plus the Great White Collar Strike, had jammed the entire city against the financial wall.

In that time of crisis she had offered through Witzheimer and Company a loan of a hundred million dollars for ninety-nine years at a tax-free three percent, plus lease of the Museum site for the same period. Thus doing me out of my Planetarium job, as well as a lot of Abyssinian gazebooks and old dinosaur bones out of their homes.

BUT everything works out for the best in this best of all possible worlds, as the old saying goes. Seventy-Seven was a great architectural improvement over that crumbling old sandstone monstrosity. Its glass and chromium spire rose eight hundred and fifty feet beside the park, almost in the exact geographical center of Manhattan's stony spine, its foundation trusses going down two hundred feet and locked into the rock.

The city got an additional source of tax revenue instead of an expenditure. The better grade of stuffed bull animals in the museum had the stuffing taken out of them, which must have felt hot in summer, and got spread on Seventy-Seven's lobby and hall floors for a rug's-eye view of nylon-clad loveliness.

As for me, my janitorial salary was fifteen bucks a month more than I'd gotten for playing Atlas and wheeling all the constellations in the sky around, and frequently getting a stiff neck. At the same time I had plenty of space to set up my inclinometer apparatus and leisure to work on my figures, numerical, that is, which otherwise I might not have been able to.

During those early months of 1952, with all the earth strained by that imperceptible trembling.

The elevator had brought me to the penthouse floor. I pushed the door open, and stepped out into Celia's living room.

Celia and her guests were out on the terrace beyond the glass walls. I crossed the fifty-foot spun-chinchilla rug as soft as mice's ears, past the huge gold built-in pipe-organ TV combination and the rose-petal divans, to the terrace door.

The night outside was cloudless and full of stars. A big red gibbous moon was in the west.

The whole panorama of the lighted city lay spread out from the penthouse terrace. On one side Central Park was a sixth of a mile below, with Fifth Avenue beside it looking like a sequined ribbon. On the other side, beyond Riverside Park and the endless firefly cars along the West Side Highway, there was the Hudson, with moored and running lights of boats on it and its ancient submerged bed running out a hundred miles beneath the sea.

Radio masts with red airplane-warning beacons stood on the crest of the Palisades, and lighted signs at the river edge all up and down the Jersey shore—"Drink Old Goat," "Spal for Frying," "Wash with Spun." Up at the amusement park across from Grant's Tomb the roller-coaster was lit up like a string of flying beads, and next to it the moving airline time-sign spelled out letter by letter in endless chain, "It's honeymoon time in Miami. The time is now 11:09. Fly with your girl to those balmy air-conditioned beaches, \$108 a round trip plus tax. The time is now 11:10."

Farther to the north, beyond George Washington Bridge and Fort Tryon Park, you could see Cassiopeia and Polaris in the sky over Westchester. They had never looked so big and white.

To the south, below Central Park, shone the General Motors' sign, and all the pink sky-haze of the Broadway lights. Rockefeller Center's tall white cliffs. The red-lit dirigible mast of the Empire State, and all the rest of midtown, and over to the left the Chrysler needle, and the glass monolith of the UN all lit up. All of Manhattan's great massed spires!

The mighty city! Man's most magnificent edifices. The world into which I'd been born. I might have been born into another world, in another age, in Egypt in Pharaoh's time or Atlantis before the flood, or on another planet in another solar system. But this one was my own.

And it was going to end, any day or hour or moment now, as near as I could figure it.

III

CELIA and her friends had set up the bridge table beside the southwest parapet. She was shuffling a deck of cards. Golden-haired and golden-skinned with summer sundeck tan, in a gold halter and white fluffy bouffant floor-length skirt like a smothering of sea-foam. Golden seraph in fleecy skirt of clouds. Baby Aphrodite clad netherly by a white loving lave of waves.

For years I'd been carrying the torch for her. That unobtainable pulchritude. But that, too, would end.

The black-haired girl sitting on her left, cream-skinned and sultry, was Lulu Lamartine in the flesh, the choice of seven million male TV fans for president. She was wearing one of her famous off-the-bosom gowns, white bodice and midnight-spangled skirt, a flash of diamond question-mark on one small edible ear. The red-haired girl with milk-white shoulders turned to me, above a cool lime-green strapless froth of gown, must be La Lulu's roommate, Dr. Habburat . . . She looked around, with big black damson eyes and dark red cherries for a mouth. And whatever she should habburat, she had it. A complete fruit basket.

"This is Lowell," Celia said, giving me her adoring smile. "Don Solomon Lowell. The Don isn't a title, it's a name. His father knew a horse. The Solomon he took himself, expressing his ambitions. I'll let you guess whether he went to Harvard. He got his master's degree at nineteen, an adolescent prodigy, and has remained one ever since. Scrape the mud off your little feet, Lowell, and bow to the ladies. You've seen Lulu in her bedroom hour a hundred times, of course, while you were experimentally working on your theories. Or theoretically working on your experiments. And Eva Hubberat, from the Euphrates. The Garden of Eden country. Her father was an Aly, and she's a princess. She can trace her ancestry back to the first Adam. Only who'd want to?"

Lulu gave me a long-eyed sweep as I eased the body down across from her. Her shoulders, clear to her wishbone and below, seemed to undulate and quiver.

"Hi, Don," she said, with her crooning voice taking me by the hand and leading me out into the

garden to pick night-blooming jasmine.

“Lo, Lulu,” I said. “But charming. Where did you get such big eyes, grandma?”

“It’s what I get paid a thousand a week for, Don,” she said confidently, smoothing the parting of her satin bodice with a finger. “Sooner or later, and doubtless sooner, you are going to ask me whether I use adhesive tape to keep it up. The answer, to you, is not too adhesive, Don.”

“A guy likes to know,” I said. “It saves time.”

“Hello, Don,” said the red-haired doll at my right, with a shy downcast sweep of houri glance. “Are scientist? Is very nice. Am scientist, also.”

“Hello, Eva,” I said. “Ceel said you were an anthropologist. It seems terrible to me. Why waste all that on specimens with bones in their ears?”

“Not that kind of anthropologist,” she smiled shyly. “Doctor. Specialist in men’s complaint. You have men gynecologists for women’s trouble. Why not woman anthropologist for men?”

“Why not, indeed?” I said. “Let me say ‘ah’ to you, Eva. I want to tell you about my symptoms.”

Celia dealt.

“Possibly I forgot to warn you both that Lowell has a one-track mind,” she said. “The Tobacco Road Belt Line. Nothing on it but rickety shanties and rusty whistle-stops.”

LULU pretended not to hear.

“Ceel’s told us you’re a complete screwball, Don,” she said languidly. “Personally I’m not too vitally interested in men’s mentalities, which always seemed a silly word to me. So you think the earth is going to suddenly turn over and throw us all off into the wide beyond. It sounds like a weird idea. What fun do you get out of it?”

“So amazing, Don,” Eva said with a shy glance. “How could it be?”

How could it be!

“Oh, in the name of heaven!” Celia said. “You’ve started him off!”

“It’s happened before,” I said, examining my cards. “More than once, in the last three billion years. Due to the old ball getting too top-heavy and off balance. Falling over onto an even keel again, with a sudden shift of poles. How do we know? Millions-year old rocks, with their north poles pointing to what’s now west or southeast. Dry desert beds which were once frozen arctic seas. The Great African Rift was probably at one time the site of the north pole. Maybe the Mindanao Deep

during another age.

“Spinning,” I said, sorting out my suits. “Getting more and more off balance. Old earth, this cockeyed globe. A two-mile-high mountain continent at its present south pole, piled with ice enough if melted to raise the whole ocean surfaces two hundred feet. No land at all at the north pole, and the remaining icebergs up there breaking away.” The compensating glaciers which used to balance Antarctica over all the northern hemisphere down to Arizona and Gibraltar have been gone for thirty thousand years. A lot of other things have changed, too, since the last shift of poles. The American continent has drifted westward. The young north-south cordillera of the Rockies-Andes had risen up to swing off balance the east-west Himalayas-Alps.

“So what do you have? Suddenly the ball turns over. Still spinning without pause around its newly established poles, still sweeping in its course around the sun. But everything on it, at the moment of its flop over, is hurled off at a tangent at a thousand-mile-an-hour speed in the direction it was going.

“Interesting phenomenon to contemplate,” I said, observing my jack and deuce of clubs. “Abstractly. Unfortunately it’s coming. Any hour or moment now. That’s what the needle says, and the needle doesn’t lie. Three passes to me? Guess I’ll bid three without.”

“That means without an ace,” Celia said sweetly. “I know you as I know a five-share trader, Don, with a rabbit’s foot in his pocket and his gas bill unpaid. I’ll double.”

“Pass, partner,” Lulu said, with an undulation of her creamy bosom. “But it does seem too utterly fantastic. Will you keep a tight hold of me, Don, when it happens? I’ve never traveled at quite such a speed before.”

“Pass,” Eva echoed, with a soft glance. “So strange and empty it sounds, Don. Without a future. Just when I have finished my specialist training, all ready to hang out my little signboard—what is the word for it, shingle? What will there be to do? Off the earth, out there?”

“Redouble,” I said, stacking my cards in my palm. “What’s there to do here?”

“Oh!” said Eva, with round mouth and eyes. “Lots of things.”

“For instance,” Lulu said.

“Play bridge!” said Celia. “Three noes,

redoubled.”

She slapped down the king of clubs.

“It’s just the overgrown adolescent’s way of getting your attention, I tell you,” she said with angel indignation. “It’s his line. An intellectual fishhook. But the bait is just a worm. It’s how he compensates for his inability to earn a decent living. The ineffectual professorial male conceit. Our trick, partner.”

She slapped down the ace.

“And declarer’s jack falls,” she murmured triumphantly.

“Queen, ten, eight, seven and trey of clubs!” she said indignantly, throwing them down. “Why, you big conceited tiddlywinks champion, you thought you’d take a chance on what Lulu might have, did you? But you’ve found at least it wasn’t clubs. You’re down three already! And you’ve had the superb male insolence ever since your voice began to creak to assume that someday I’m going to marry you and bear your Harvard-brained offspring for you and wash your shorts and cook your ravioli till the end of time. If you were the last man on earth!”

“What an utterly appalling thought!” said Lulu, with a shiver of her bosom.

“So empty,” Eva murmured. “Sad.”

“Flying right off the earth,” said Lulu. “Not a bed to sleep on.”

“The end of the race of Adam,” Eva said simply.

“If you believe him,” Celia said with seraphic disdain. “Your deal, Lulu.”

“It’s not the way I’d want it, either, dolls,” I said. “Babes. Gals. Ladies. Excuse me. How I’d want it, I couldn’t say. Maybe I don’t know. But there’s nothing I can do about it.”

“Your make, Don,” Celia said emphatically.

“My make?” I said. “Who?”

“For heaven’s sake, the cards!”

IV

CARDS. The little passionless tilt of formalized skill. Four suits, of ace, three face cards, and nine numbers each. Sort them, bid them, play them.

Spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs. Take the trick or yield it. Stack your books, and cross-pile. And the old earth spinning.

There was an intangible humming through all the Tower. But a building always hums. Elevators

sliding swiftly up and down. Boilers and electric generators down in the basement. In the seven hundred and seventy luxury-efficiency apartments below, radios, electric coffee-urns, sandwich grills, silk underthings being ironed, the stir and pulse and hum of eleven hundred of the world’s loveliest and most unobtainable dolls. And in a building so tall, up so high, the force of massed air strumming against it must be felt, too, like the vibration of a taut violin string, though no wind stirred at all.

What the needle of the inclinometer was saying down in the basement I didn’t know, and I didn’t want to know.

Lulu dealt, and I won the bid with four spades, and made them. Eva dealt, and I bid a grand slam in hearts, vulnerable, over Celia’s calculating bidding up of diamonds. And got doubled by her, and redoubled, and made it for game and rubber.

“If you’d had just one club in your hand, Lowell,” she said, totaling up the score.

“If I’d had one six or eight years ago, I ought to have banged you over the head and dragged you off to my lair,” I said bitterly. “By this time we’d have had fourteen kids, counting the twins and sextuplets. Maybe they wouldn’t have had a very long existence to look forward to. But at least they would’ve had some, and names. It’s too damned late now.”

“I haven’t the least idea what you’re talking about,” she said. “I’m not an Irish setter, given to large litters. A thirty-eight hundred rubber. Would you mind changing seats with Don, Eva? You and Lulu—”

I remember we had begun to change places.

“It’s honeymoon time in Miami,” the airline sign was saying, up by the roller-coaster across the river from Grant’s Tomb. “The time is now 11:39.”

ALSO I remember that all New Yorkers were supposed to believe Robert E. Lee had invented the steamboat which had been named after him, and was buried in Grant’s Tomb.

Eva took the chair I’d vacated, opposite Lulu, facing the west parapet and the Hudson, I remember. Sitting across from Celia, conscious of her knees—some women, I remember thinking, have pillows, and some have metal hinges, but some have knees. A rare, delicate, and complicated mechanism. Snakes and fishes don’t have knees, I remember thinking. Nor mules nor horses, except a bony backward-jointed kind to sit on when they

balk. Grasshoppers and fleas and other insects might have knees, I didn't know, never having studied that chapter of biology. But if they had, they were all too hoppy. There was nothing like a human knee, female, tender, sympathetic and expressive, with the feeling of *vrai soie*. The earth was good.

For what purpose, I remember thinking, all these fine things. To be hurled off into the void? It seemed such waste!

Lulu's knee was worth a thousand TV dollars, just alone. Anything else she threw in was gratis.

Not to disparage Eva's in any way. There is never a real comparison. One may be softer, one more pliant, but all are comforting. I loved even Celia's knee, smooth, firm, perfectly sculptured, marble Venus's or maybe Juno's, though completely unresponsive.

And all would soon end.

"East and west this rubber," I remembered Celia was saying, rechecking the score. "You and I, Don, north and south—"

And Eva and I had just changed places, as I say, while she was telling us. I had just sat down. The moving time-sign up across the Hudson had just said 11:39 when I had glanced at it. Eastern daylight saving time. Sidereal time about 22:36:08, at seventy-four degrees and so many minutes, seconds, yards and feet west of Greenwich, forty-two degrees and so many minutes, seconds, yards and feet north. At 77th Street and Central Park West, almost in the exact center of Manhattan's spine. On July 29th, 1953. On the spinning ball called Earth.

That was the approximate moment when it happened. Instantly. The huge red lopsided moon swung with a rush from over above the Hudson down below the Empire State. Polaris with the Dipper swept into the western sky, or what had always been the west since I had known it.

There was a great groan through all the steel bones of Seventy-Seven, and I was slammed around in my chair against the parapet and Lulu. Eva and Celia herself were sprawling in a circle on the cracked floor.

"In heaven's name!" said Celia. "What on earth!"

SOUTH of us the Empire State and all the other midtown masses were bending over beneath the great red cockeyed moon. They seemed to shed

their towers and upper stories like a gang of boys on a riverbank peeling off their shirts to make a dive, then toppled to the left. Their lights—all the lights of the city—had gone out.

Miles beyond, down in lower Manhattan, there was something which looked like the Woolworth Tower flying eastward through the moonswept sky, accompanied by a mass composed of all the great financial district skyscrapers like a swarm of spears, breaking up in flight.

To the southeast, along East 42nd, the Chrysler needle was toppling to the northeast. The UN building, which had been all blazing with the war excitement of mad Russia on the surge tonight, was spilling darkly over on its left flank.

We sprawled on the shattered tiles as the bones of Seventy-Seven groaned deep in their foundations.

"What on earth!" Celia gasped again, striving to pull down her foam of skirts over her milk and honey thighs. "Don Lowell, if this is one of your crazy jokes—"

Lulu and Eva said nothing. They were cowering in my arms.

"Get up!" I told them. "Run! Run for the elevator! The Waldorf and all Park Avenue are coming towards us! They may spill farther than the park! Some of the flying stuff at least is going to hit the terrace!"

It wasn't till that instant, I think, as we ran towards the door of Celia's still lighted living room, that I was conscious of all the roar and screaming. The screaming of the girls in the building. From the streets around and from the whirling air. The roar of riven steel and stone, and the churning of New York Bay boiling up the Hudson in a hundred-foot high wall.

A great roar, a great deafening hurricane of sound. The screaming of the great city, of the world, flying through the night and past us with a vast banshee cry.

Celia's private elevator which I'd come up in was still at the floor. The girls ran across the twenty-foot-high living room and sprawled into it, just as a torrential rain of stuff began to crash on the terrace and penthouse roof, showering plaster down from the ceiling. I smashed the glass of the air-raid alarm-gong beside the elevator as I plunged in after them, summoning everybody to the bombproof basement.

The other elevators were spilling out loads of

déshabilled babes into the still bright basement when we reached it. At least our own dynamos were still operating. Two or three hundred must have gotten there before us from the lower floors. Amid all the sobbing and screaming the cars went shooting up again, obeying the frantic buttons. . . . By tests which had been run, in nine and three-quarters minutes after the gong they could all be evacuated down, to the last one.

It wasn't so necessary now, though. The twisting stress had lasted less than a minute. And Seventy-Seven had withstood it. There would be no repetition. The secondary danger, of being shattered by a bombardment of hurtling other buildings, had passed, as well, thanks to the location here inside the park, with the nearest skyscrapers a mile or more away.

BY NOW the heavier stuff must have shot clear off the earth. Broken tree-limbs and stuff like that would be all that was still floating in the whirlwind air.

Tidal waves, I thought of. But they'd not surge up this high. The ocean would subside again, and fairly quickly, beneath the bright, white cloudless stars and the red moon. After all, it had seen this thing before. It had been in business a long time.

The inclinometer needle had shot clear off the graph and back again in an inverted V. It was now registering a geometrically straight line. It might not veer from it by a ten thousandth millimeter for the next three hundred thousand years.

They were all clawing at me with a cross-rake of hysterical questions. They'd torn my shirt off, and had hold of my belt. I pulled myself free for the moment with what clothes I had, heaving my lab stool up on the table and vaulting up with it. I climbed up on top of it, holding up my hand.

"Babes!" I said. "Dolls! Gals! This is what's happened, and where we stand."

They were all career girls, trained to give instant attention to official announcements. The milling and commotion ceased at once. In the silence someone dropped a bobby-pin, but that was all.

I looked down over their lake of upturned faces. Blonde and brunette and strawberry, blue-black and smooth brown heads. Celia and Lulu and Eva, who had got separated in the melee. Miss Diane Starbuckle, wrapped in her translucent shower-curtain, with her amber curls all damp, as if still watching me pursue Tom the terrified cockroach

around the baseboards and back of the pipes in her bathroom. Orange-haired Irene Moon, the baby atom-bomb of Hot Time, orchestra seats a hundred smacks. Leeta, Leta, and Lotta Joy, the blonde triplet rodeo bulldoggers from Texas, in their white buckskin shorts and Lone Star belts. Miss Aki Suki the doll Japanene artist of 44E, and Miss Yoni Sarawat from the Vale of Kashmir who did her Dance of the Bride of Kali in the most ultra-private clubs, and Miss Pela Mela the delicate bronze UN secretary from Bali, in her native costume of batik.

A sea of hundreds more. Eleven hundred, at a conservative estimate. And it was a time to be conservative. From every state of the Union and Canada and Mexico, Europe and South America, Syria, the Pacific islands and the White and Blue Niles. All with upthrust bosoms. All red parted lips. The world's most beautiful and desirable and unobtainable girls.

"Babes, it's overturned," I said. "Old earth. It's found new poles. It's still spinning on, however. It's still going around the sun. There's nothing whatever to be alarmed about.

"It found its new poles, as it happened," I explained, "precisely forty-eight degrees, less some minutes and seconds, yards and feet, to the west, or left, of where its old ones were. A distance of about thirty-seven hundred miles. A distance, as it happens, precisely equal to that which Seventy-Seven here was from the old north pole.

"It turned over on the pivot of this geographical spot, in other words, by chance. Or, more exactly, because of a complexity of geophysical incalculables, which, if written as an equation in figures the size of hydrogen electrons, would take an angel flying with the speed of light a million years to read.

"We are still at forty-two degrees, some minutes and seconds, yards and feet north. The longitude is what we choose to call it.

"The only difference is that what was west is now approximately north of us. New Jersey, et cetera. What was south is west. Miami. East—Jones Beach, Europe—has become south. North, east. Buffalo, Niagara Falls. The sun will rise tomorrow, at this time of year, from somewhere in the direction of the Berkshires. It will set in the direction of Atlantic City. But it will rise and set. The new poles are situated— But you can take turns looking at the globe afterwards, on the table beside my stool.

“Old earth,” I said, swallowing, but still giving out with the big cheerful grin, “has just found a new balance. There will be some differences and adjustments. But we’re still on it. There’s no more danger to any of us. None of us here is going to die tonight nor tomorrow, nor until we’ve lived out our full and natural spans. Any questions?”

“What’s happened—!” They were all surging and shouting with raised hands. “What’s happened to all the rest of the world, Lowell?”

THEY had seen some of it out of their windows, of course. Some things I hadn’t myself. They had to be told.

“We turned upon the pin,” I said, “without change in relative position. All around us, though, with geometrically increased speed from the pivot outward, everything went flying off in the direction earth had been spinning to that instant. But the oceans will soon subside back in their basins. The mountains are still standing. The fish are still in the lakes and rivers, or most of them. The bats survived in their caves, and the ants beneath the ground. Many of the birds, even, may have caught themselves on wing and flown against it—they have an eonal memory going back to before the last overturning, as they show in their migratory-flight patterns.

“The earth is still with us, and it will still take seed. There will be new species developing to take the place of the sheep and cattle and other larger mammals. Life marches on.”

“People!” they all waved their arms and shouted. “Men! Children! Our families! Everybody! What about them?”

“Gone,” I said, swallowing. “Smashed in their toppling and flying buildings, or swept off instantly from the streets and roads and fields. They never knew what hit them. In a few seconds lack of oxygen would have rendered them unconscious in outer space. They just went sweeping off. Over the whole world. All.”

Silence for a moment was over them. The sea of their motionless upturned faces, red parted lips. I saw Celia working towards me through the jam.

She stood pressed against the table edge below me. She had twisted and fought her way through the pack. Her gold halter was half torn off, her white skin of clouds was ripped to ribbons, her bobbed golden curls in disarray, her face smudged. But her angelic eyes were still as beautiful and

bright.

“Why, Don, you are the last—” she gasped. She lifted up her golden arms to me above her perfect breast. “Help me to climb up, darling! I’ll marry you!”

From eleven hundred throats there was a single scream. “You?”

The rushing sea came at me. The lab table heaved, buckled, and crashed over, and I went down with it.

“You!” The scream was all around me and over me. “You and who else?”

Old earth. Old earth must be replenished. It can’t be left to the fishes and the bats. To the birds and the three hundred thousand species of crawling things beneath the stone. The million years which the race has taken to come to this perfection must still go on. It was agreed the only fair thing was to draw straws.

They’re going to hold the drawing next October 31st, Hallowe’en, which is Guy Fawkes Day in England, I understand, and Walpurgis Night over all the earth from ancient times. It may be a Mohammedan and Buddhist holiday, too, for all I know. Anyway, it’s the date.

A drawing for both of us. Because I wasn’t the only man, as it turned out. Patrolman Horace Bulger, Shield Number 22,835, bald and fifty-one, had just stepped in through the door of Seventy-Seven to check his watch by the lobby clock, at the moment it happened.

VI

NOW, in the warm Indian summer afternoons, in my spare moments relaxing on the Central Park wall across the street from Seventy-Seven, directing Celia, Lulu, Eva, Diane, and all the rest of my battalion of dolls in cultivating their garden plots—they each have half an acre, and some late summer onions, turnips, and potatoes have already begun to sprout—I have been turning the globe over in my hands. And, examining it from all angles, it occurs to me that in the Antipodes, at a point precisely opposite to here, there must have been another pivot on which earth turned in its overset, without change of relative position.

At forty-two degrees, so many minutes and seconds, yards and feet south. At what was a hundred and six degrees, less so many minutes and seconds, yards and feet east of Greenwich. At a

point in the old South Seas a thousand miles off Albany, Australia.

And I can see in my mind a ship which was at that precise spot on the water, at the instant when earth overset.

I can see it as a whaling ship, its tanks loaded with a reeking cargo officered and manned by a stalwart crew of whiskered Norwegians, Lascars, Yankee and Portygee harpooners from Cape Cod and Martha's Vineyard. Boatswains, boilermen and sea cooks out of all the ports.

I can see that great white floating factory heading west-northwest for the Indian Ocean, steaming at twelve knots, with the two hundred and ninety-seven hairy men aboard her thinking of all the money they have earned and dreaming of all the girls they'll spend it on.

And suddenly the high northern forenoon sun swings over to the west. The gyroscopic heading swings from west-northwest to northeast by east. And a great maelstrom of boiling ocean swirls all about that great staunch ship, smothering her while mile-high waves lift up on the horizons.

The ocean subsides. The burst bellies of dead heavy-pressure fish from old ocean's bottom lie floating on the surface of the sea. Gulls rush by, screaming.

The ship is still afloat, but gets no reply to her radio calls. Alone on the ocean. Alone in the world. She proceeds onward cautiously, making nothing by sun reckoning, and in the night by star. Until her first landfall, where they can orientate themselves by chart.

They must have figured it out for themselves by this time, being navigators, what it was that happened. Maybe they've figured out that there should be one other point on the globe, too, where the relative position hadn't altered. Which had turned upon a pivot, like them, in the sudden overset. And maybe they are sailing around Good Hope now, having found Suez sand-filled and desolate. Heading for New York Bay across the South Atlantic by the great circle course. Maybe they'll be here soon.

But just to let them know what happened, if they haven't figured it, I've written this report, and Officer Bulger and the girls are making ten thousand carbon copies to put in all the Coke bottles we've been able to collect from their rooms and my blackstrap bottles from the basement, to throw into the sea.

I'm glad this has reached you, whoever reads this. You have the address. The mat is out, the door is always open. And welcome, brothers.