

Bad Luck and Trouble

by Jack Swenson

Jake is at the ballgame when the shaking starts. It takes him two hours to get home. He listens to the reports on the radio as he sits in traffic. A freeway overpass has collapsed; they don't know how many people are dead.

When Jake gets back to his townhouse, he checks for a gas leak. He sniffs the air. Nothing. The dog is happy to see him. His tail thumps on the carpet. The cat is asleep on the couch.

He goes outside and talks to a neighbor. "Everything all right at your house?" Jake asks. The other man nods. He looks disappointed.

Jake goes back inside, turns on the TV, and sits down. It is the end of the world! A lane of the Bay Bridge has fallen into the bay. A building downtown has lost its skin. Cars in the street below are covered with dust and bricks. Out on the avenues there is a fire, and an apartment that used to be three stories is now two. The ground floor is in the basement.

He calls a friend and asks him if he is all right. His friend says more or less.

Jake makes himself a salami sandwich for supper. He watches the show on TV. The dog parks himself at his feet and licks his lips.

The phone rings. It's Jake's wife. She asks him if he is okay. He tells her he is fine. "And you?" he asks. Okay, she says. "How's Prince Charming?" he asks. Don't start, she says.

Jake goes to bed that night and dreams that he is a baseball player. It's game one of the World Series, and he goes oh for five.

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He strikes out the first four times he comes to bat, and the last time he hits into a double play.

