

The Shaker

by Jake Barnes

I was in a grocery store when the earth began to rock and roll. When people stopped screaming I got to my feet and looked around. Signs were swaying overhead. A rack had tipped over in the liquor department, and the air reeked with the smell.

A man and a woman argued over the size of the quake. They were sitting on the floor like Tweedledum and Tweedledee. The man said it was an eight; the woman said a five. She had seen worse, she said.

One by one people got to their feet. I was in a checkout line, and a man ahead of me looked over the counter. "Can we get a little service around here?" he asked. A sheepish clerk stood up and checked him out.

When I got home I sniffed the air, checking for a gas leak. I couldn't smell anything. The dog was in the TV room. His tail thumped the carpet. The cat was asleep on the couch in the living room. I went outside and looked around.

My neighbor was wandering around his yard looking at the ground. "Any damage?" I asked. He shook his head. He seemed to be disappointed.

I went back inside and turned on the TV. Holy Toledo! The talking heads were beside themselves. It was end of the world! The upper deck of a section of the freeway had collapsed. A lane of the roadway on the bridge had broken off and was canted into the bay like a playground slide. A building downtown had lost its skin. The street below was covered with bricks and dust. A three story apartment house out on the avenues was now two stories. The first story was in the basement.

I sat and watched the carnage. My estranged wife lived in The City. I wondered if she was all right. I tried to call, but all I got was a busy signal.

I watched TV all evening. It was quite a show. I didn't mind it that nobody could call in or out. It was kind of nice. It made me feel safe somehow.

