

## The Earthquake

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When my father was alive, he had a room with a big fireplace added to the back of our house. Diane says he built it just for me so I could have more room to play. He also put up a swing set with two swings, a slide and a teeter totter. Diane says she's jealous of me because I am an only child and I get the swing set all to myself. She has to share her attention with two brothers and two sisters and their back yard is too small for a swing set. My mother lets her come over and share all her attention with me. I don't think it would be bad sharing my attention with brothers and sisters. At least there would be someone to sit on the other side of the teeter totter, and maybe someone to talk to who doesn't just say, "Uh huh. Uh huh. Don't you want to go play in your room now?"

It's called the Sylmar Quake because the hospitals in Sylmar, on the other side of the Santa Suzanna's, collapse and kill a lot of people. The shaking lasts a full sixty seconds, which doesn't sound like a long time, but for an earthquake, it's forever. It's early in the morning when it hits and I am in the big room that my father built for just for me. I stand up quick when I feel the shaking, but I have to balance just so to keep from falling back down. I watch as my miniature tea set skips across the mantle above the fireplace then leaps to its death, teacup by tiny teacup.

I'm riding the floor like a wave, sofa and arm chairs dancing circles around me. My mother comes stumbling in from another room, wearing the same dress she wore yesterday.

She runs right past me toward the grandfather clock, like she always does when there's an earthquake. It's an antique so she has to hug it to protect it from falling. When the shaking stops, I put my hands over my ears while my mother sits on the floor and lets out one scream then another until a neighbor finally comes to calm her down.

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