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ONE

The Bridge

9:22 A.M.

VICKI sat in horror as the bridge wobbled and buckled. Mrs. Jenness slammed on the brakes and covered her eyes.

“Make it stop,” Mrs. Jenness whimpered.

A few minutes earlier, Mrs. Jenness had been gloating over catching Vicki with a new edition of the *Underground*. Vicki knew she was headed back to the detention center, or possibly worse. Now both were hanging on for their lives.

Vicki checked to be sure the windows were up, in case the bridge collapsed and they fell into the water.

“Back up!” Vicki shouted.

“Make it stop!” Mrs. Jenness said.

Vicki heard the thundering of the great earthquake. It roared like a thousand cannons. The normally calm river rushed by with whitecaps as the bridge rocked.

Vicki decided to jump out and run, but

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before she could get the door unlocked, the bridge tipped violently and the car rolled on its top. The windshield shattered. Shards of glass flew everywhere.

They came to rest on the railing, the front of the car over the edge. Several cars toppled into the water. One man had gotten out of his vehicle and raced for safety. A few steps later and he was in the air, flying headlong into the choppy water.

How could the bridge last this long? If they fell with the bridge, the twisted metal and concrete would drag them down. The bridge tipped, then slammed the car against the railing again. Metal scraped against concrete. The back tires rose off the pavement. Vicki and Mrs. Jenness screamed as they plunged over the edge.

The car landed back end first but didn't sink. Water poured in through the broken windows, then the car settled. The current took them underneath the bridge, chunks of asphalt and steel plopping in the water around them.

The water reached Vicki's feet and took her breath away. Mrs. Jenness looked terrified, and she shook uncontrollably. Vicki couldn't help feeling sorry for her.

"We're gonna get out of this," Vicki said.

"I can't swim!" Mrs. Jenness screamed.

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The earthquake rolled on as the car spun in the river. Water continued to rise through the floor. As the car sank, Vicki unbuckled herself and Mrs. Jenness.

"Crawl on top," Vicki shouted. "I'll help you make it to shore."

Mrs. Jenness stared past Vicki and pointed. A downed tree stuck out over the water. The car rushed toward it.

"Get down!" Vicki yelled.

The treetop rammed through the opening of the back window and stopped within inches of Mrs. Jenness's head. The car hung by the tree, a foot above the surface of the water.

"We have to get out," Vicki said. "If the tree breaks, we're dead. And if the water level rises, the tree will hold us under."

"Stay here," Mrs. Jenness said. "Wait for help."

Vicki noticed a red gash on the woman's forehead. She must have hit the steering wheel hard. Part of Vicki wanted to leave her. Mrs. Jenness had been no end of trouble for the Young Trib Force. But something inside wouldn't let her.

"We go together," Vicki said. "I'll get out and pull you through the other side."

Vicki struggled through the window. The car top was crushed. She cut her hand on a piece of glass that clung to the windshield, but she

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didn't let go. The river rose, and the rushing water and trembling earth were deafening.

When she got to Mrs. Jenness, Vicki looked back in horror as the bridge collapsed. Huge concrete pylons snapped like twigs. Cars were trapped in the twisting metal. Vicki braced herself as a huge wave swept over them and nearly knocked her off. When the wave passed, Vicki coughed and saw the water pouring in the windows.

"Give me your hand!" Vicki shouted above the noise.

Then it happened. Darkness. The sun went black. Vicki heard the roar of the earth and water, but she saw nothing. She felt helpless.

Vicki hung on to the roof as another violent rumble nearly shook the tree loose. A cracking, an explosion, and another deafening shake sent the water swirling around them. Vicki reached into the car and realized the water level was going down.

"You still there?" Vicki screamed.

"I think so," came the weak reply.

"Turn on your lights!" Vicki yelled.

The beams cut through the darkness. Vicki blinked and wiped her eyes. She couldn't believe it. The earth had opened from one side of the river to the other into a bottomless chasm. Water cascaded into the

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hole but didn't fill it. It looked like the hole just kept going to the center of the earth. The riverbed was changing, and water from both sides of the crevice rushed in. If they fell into the hole, they would never be found. If they fell into the water on either side of the chasm, the current would drag them into it as well.

The car shifted, and Vicki nearly lost her balance. She turned as a flash lit the sky and revealed a scene Vicki would never forget. The tree roots barely clung to a wall of shifting earth. Below her was black nothingness.

"Help me," Vicki muttered. "Please, God . . ."



Judd Thompson had noticed the dead animals along the road to the reeducation facility. The GC pilot he had come to trust, Taylor Graham, sat beside him in the GC transport van. Both were handcuffed. Taylor had been beaten during his time in custody, and Judd could tell he was weak. The two were on their way to a maximum 5 facility when the great earthquake began.

Judd noticed flagpoles and weather vanes rocking as they passed through the farmlands

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of central Illinois. Squirrels, rabbits, dogs, cats, and deer darted back and forth. People were used to seeing raccoons and opossums dead on the road, but now it was every kind of animal. Lifeless bodies were strewn about the road.

The driver swerved to miss a Great Dane, and the road in front of the van buckled and heaved upward.

"Hang on!" Taylor screamed.

The van went airborne. Judd held on to the seat in front of him as they crashed to the pavement. He found himself suspended by his seat belt as the van skidded to a stop. But the earth seemed to pick up momentum.

Taylor Graham unbuckled himself and kicked open the emergency exit. Judd followed. He smelled gasoline.

"Good thing they didn't put us in leg irons," Taylor said.

"What about them?" Judd said, pointing to the driver and the other guard. Both men were in the front of the van. Neither moved.

"You're right," Taylor said. "We need the keys to these handcuffs."

Before Taylor could get to them, an explosion ripped through the van and set the vehicle ablaze. Judd and Taylor were thrown into a ditch.

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"We'll never get them now," Taylor said.
"Come on. We'll find a place that's safe."

As they ran toward a cornfield, Judd tried to balance himself. It felt like he was walking on the deck of a ship in a hurricane.

The sound was incredible. When he had been mad at his parents he would go into his room and turn his headphones up full blast. This was louder, and there was no turning down the volume.

Judd glanced back as a huge crater opened. The burning van and a section of road were swallowed whole. Black smoke rose from the wreckage. Nearby a farmhouse vanished. Horses ran in circles in their corral.

"When's this thing gonna stop?" Taylor shouted.

Judd heard crumpling metal and saw power lines. The towers fell, the deadly lines crashing with them.

"Look out!" Judd yelled.

When the sun went black, Judd couldn't see his hands in front of his face. He heard crackling nearby.

"Don't move," Taylor said.

Judd's heart beat furiously. One wrong step and they could be killed instantly.

A flash lit the sky, and Judd saw the power lines only a few feet away.

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"To your left," Taylor said, and the two struggled to their feet.



Lionel Washington was in the exercise yard near the main compound building when the great earthquake began. He had been told he had family who wanted to care for him. That was a lie. What he found in this secluded Alabama town was a Global Community training camp. Lionel and the others were being groomed as monitors. The camp leaders called them the "eyes and ears of Nicolae Carpathia."

Lionel hated the idea of helping the Global Community, but pretending to go along with them was his only chance. More than anything he wanted to get back to his friends in Mount Prospect. If that meant memorizing a few GC chants and faking obedience, he'd do it.

Someone in camp noticed a horde of snakes slithering across the compound. Moments later, Lionel felt the ground rumble. He turned to run inside a building, then stopped. A friend ran past him.

"Don't go in there, Conrad!" Lionel yelled.

Conrad kept going. Lionel followed, screaming for the boy to stop. Lionel caught

The Bridge

him on the stairwell, grabbed his arm, and turned for the front door.

"What're you doing?" Conrad said.

"Earthquake!" Lionel said. "We have to get out!"

Conrad ran. Lionel followed. The hardwood floor vibrated. He was almost outside when the beams on the porch gave way. Lionel shoved Conrad to safety as the porch crashed down on him.



After almost being caught by the Global Community, Ryan Daley promised Vicki he would stay inside. But when Phoenix bounded into his basement hideout, barking and running in circles, Ryan figured the dog needed to go out. He opened the back door and watched Phoenix scamper around the yard. The dog sniffed at the air and took off again.

At first, Ryan thought he heard a train. But there were no tracks near Vicki's house. He ran into the kitchen as cabinets opened, spilling dishes and glasses.

What do I do? Ryan wondered. *Go to the basement? Upstairs? Outside?*

He dove under the kitchen table as a light fell from the ceiling. Through the sliding glass door he saw the ground moving. A

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neighbor's in-ground pool cracked and collapsed. A huge oak tree in the backyard leaned to one side, then reversed and crashed into the house, the roots tearing up the yard. Phoenix darted back and forth.

"Run, Phoenix!" Ryan shouted.

Then darkness.

Pitch black.

Ryan rolled from under the table and snatched a flashlight from the utility drawer. He switched it on and screamed. The kitchen floor cracked. Pieces of tile snapped and hit him in the face. He tried to roll to the opposite side as the floor heaved upward, then tilted. Ryan grabbed the leg of a chair as he slipped through the opening. The flashlight fell and smacked into something hard. The chair he clung to wedged on each side of the crack. Ryan hung in the air, peering into what had been the basement. Cracked concrete and rocks filled the room.

Above him darkness. Below him the tiny beam of the flashlight.

Another shift and the chair snapped. Ryan fell into the churning debris.



Chaya Stein had gone to her father's house with mixed emotions. Her mother had died in the same blast that had killed Bruce

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Barnes. Chaya wanted a keepsake from her mother. Chaya's father didn't want to see her and asked that she be gone by 9:00 A.M.

At 9:18 Chaya heard someone in the front room. Mr. Stein spoke sharply. Chaya knew her father was still angry that she believed in Jesus as the Messiah.

A chunk of plaster hit Chaya. A rumble rolled beneath her.

Mr. Stein stood in the doorway, ready to leave.

Chaya screamed, "It's coming!"

She grabbed the railing with both hands and held on. A chandelier in the front room fell, just missing Mr. Stein. The railing cracked and sent Chaya over the edge to the floor.

The ceiling gave way as Mr. Stein rushed toward her. A huge beam fell and landed on her legs, crunching the bones. The other end of the beam smashed into the grand piano, splintering it to pieces. Bricks from the fireplace littered the floor.

Through the dust and noise, Chaya's father yelled her name. He staggered into the room, horror on his face.

"I'll get you out!" he said.

Before he could move, the ceiling collapsed, raining boards and plaster. The room was

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white with dust. Chaya screamed for her father to save himself, but he didn't answer.

A beautiful morning had transformed into darkness. Chaya shivered as she struggled to move. The beam had her legs pinned. Her father lay under rubble only a few feet away. And she heard nothing but the most fierce earthquake in history.



Darrion Stahley was lonely. Her mother had been arrested a full week ago, and Darrion felt powerless to help. Darrion had been brought to Donny and Sandy Moore's house for safety. Early that Monday morning she chatted with Sandy. Donny was heading to the church. Just talking with the Moores made Darrion feel better.

Mrs. Moore had lost a baby in the disappearances. She and Donny said they looked forward to seeing their child in heaven someday.

Darrion left Sandy eating her breakfast and reading the paper. Darrion retreated into the shelter Mr. Moore had built under the house. It wasn't finished, but Darrion was able to relax there.

Darrion was angry at her mother for getting arrested. They could have gone back

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to their cottage in Wisconsin and no one would have known. Now her mom was in the custody of the Global Community, falsely accused of murdering her husband.

As Darrion thought about ways to help her mother escape, she heard a rumbling. The room began to shake. She screamed for Mrs. Moore, then heard a crash above. The floor of the basement caved in. The limbs of a tree pushed through a hole in the kitchen floor.

Darrion pulled the door of the shelter closed. She knelt with the earth shaking violently around her, and she wept with fear.