

In this excerpt from the novel "The Life Line," Tom is trapped under the San Francisco Bay in a BART train because of a small earthquake. Earlier, a bomb had exploded at one of the train stations -- and everyone is on edge.

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A flicker and the emergency lighting came to life, illuminating the dimmed cars and bringing some relief to the stranded passengers. A wave of approving murmurs reached a crescendo, then died as the brief moment of hope was replaced by the ever-present emergency situation.

Tom breathed a heavy sigh as he let his body lean against the inside door in the cab of the train where he, Bob, and Peter continued discussing strategy and hoping for the appearance of rescue personnel. The radio had all but died; cell phones were useless so far underwater without a signal and little hope was held by the three men for contact with the outside world.

The air was heavy with doubt. Having worked for the BART system for many years, Tom felt sure in the back of his mind rescue would come soon. There were procedures on the books for any conceivable incident, including bombs, earthquakes, hijackings -- more conceivable than one might think -- and many other possible emergencies. He knew that rescue would come.

Even with the sureness he felt, Tom's mind was still plagued with worry. He felt confused in his mind and could not pinpoint from where the confusion had come. He was facing problems so unlike any he had ever dealt with in his life and he could not balance his feelings or thoughts with what he knew was right. His worry was now with himself, but that was slowly being replaced with his concern for the people who had died or were injured in the blast. He even thought about Karen. What was she doing, how was she feeling about the news of the blast? He hated her, more than he could remember ever hating anyone; yet now, as his weak, exhausted body lay propped against the cab door, his mind was wondering -- sincerely -- whether she was okay.

He thought about another matter as he fought to sort out the confusion plaguing his mind. There was a man sitting in one of the cars. Tom remembered now that the man seemed to have fought his way onto the train as it prepared to leave the Embarcadero station. Tom did not think it odd how this little man clutched too tightly to a briefcase he was carrying. He thought it could be someone who had been mugged once and had no intention of falling victim again. As Tom thought further of this man, he began to entertain a certain curiosity about who he was and why he seemed so nervous. *Could he just be panicked about the bomb and the quake?* No other passenger was reacting with such fear evident on his face. *Could he be sick?* Maybe he was in need of medication. Tom toyed with the possibilities, turned his tired body around and peered through the window in the cab door looking at the man who was seated only a few feet away. *That man is afraid,* he concluded. *Something is making him run scared. What could be wrong?*

Something in his gut pained him as he watched this man. Through all that had happened, this man had remained in the same seat almost as if he were scared to death to move. *Move....*

Tom blinked his eyes, turned away from the man to look through the front window of the cab. *Tom, old boy. You're getting old. Letting your mind get away from*

*you.*

He sighed again and noticed that Bob and Peter had both fallen into a fitful, yet painfully necessary sleep. Tom let his body sink to the floor, still leaning against the door, and closed his eyes to nap for a minute or two. When the rescue team arrived, he would need to look good for the media, and Barbara -- if she came.

As thoughts of the auburn-haired reporter filled his mind, Tom drifted off into a hard and fast sleep.