Room Three: A Firestorm From Hell

San Francisco Burning

The fire department responded to fifty-two fire alarms in the first half-hour following the earthquake. Initial battles with fire in the Mission District and the Western Addition were successful. These victories were countered by the conflagration that grew up at the eastern end of Market Street, near the waterfront. This area of the city was built on made land, which meant it suffered more from the earthquake's shakings and thus saw more blazes erupt. Finding fire hydrants dry, firemen resorted to desperate means, turning to saloon watering troughs and the sewers to douse the fires. As morning dragged on, fires sprouted up in other areas of the city. These new fires were blamed on those who unwittingly caused the fires by cooking on stoves that were connected to earthquake-damaged chimneys.

The immediate shock of finding entire building facades reduced to rubble was quickly overshadowed, in some ways literally, by the fire that San Franciscans saw rise near Market Street. By the end of the third day of the fire, the area where these refugees stood would also be reduced to ashes by the fire.