



## The Water Tower

Clara didn't dare look behind her. If there was someone following her, she'd be better off getting as far away as possible before they caught her. That way, they might simply send her to the factory and none of her family. She'd heard that was what happened if you were caught trespassing; they'd send you to work in the factories. Casting bullets and sewing uniforms, Sandra had said during arithmetic. Right now, Clara had to concentrate.

They hadn't set off the sirens yet. That was a good sign. Only the occasional scream of the air-raid sirens around London provided any punctuation to the otherwise silent night. She'd been pretty sure the guard on the gate hadn't seen her duck under the barrier and dart across the pitch-black car park towards the ruins of the old warehouse in the distance. That was one good thing - the only good thing, really - about the blackouts. It made it so much easier to creep about.

Over in the east, on the edge of the tarmac desert and beyond the busted chain-link fence, was the hollowed out shell of the community hall where Clara had celebrated becoming a teenager only a week before. Now, nothing was left except for one brick wall and a section of the roof. What the bomb had left standing, the fire had consumed like a hungry tiger.

Whenever the air-raid horns died down, silence gripped the night. Only the marching-band drumbeat of her heart threatened to disturb the peace. Still, she sprinted on, guided only by the basic information Tommy had given her and her friends the day before.

"Head past the guard and across the car park. Keep the moon behind you and look for the base of the tall water-tower. It's just past it and on the right, under a big pile of rubble. You can just about see it if you take a torch," he'd muttered against his will after they'd pestered him for hours.

Word had got out about it a few days before; after the community centre had exploded in the middle of the night. Nobody believed it though, not until Tommy was brave enough to go and see for himself. Even then, most of the children called him a liar; said he'd never really been there.

By now, Clara had slowed her pace down to a creeping walk. The water-tower stood over her like a watchful parent: she knew she must be close. She took a deep breath, feeling the cold night air freeze her lungs. Click! The sound of the torch turning on threatened to shatter the night sky. Blinding white light poured out over the rubble at her feet and danced a merry waltz as she swung it back and forth.

Suddenly, a flash of green and gun-metal grey stopped her in her tracks. There it was. The stories were true, after all. She'd never expected to find it, not really. She'd always assumed Tommy was all talk; it turned out, he'd been here, too.

She breathed deeply and tentatively stretched out a shaking hand. She was so close to touching it; she imagined the heat of it against her fingertips. Closer. She didn't want to rush the moment...

"Oi, you! Stop! Step back this instant!" the voice of the guard crashed around her like waves on a rocky shore. She knew she'd been caught.

## INFERENCE FOCUS

1. Why was it a good sign that they hadn't set off the sirens?
2. Why is she creeping about?
3. Why does the author refer to a "tarmac desert"?
4. Why had Tommy only given the information **against his will**?
5. What do you think she had found? Why?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**R**

How old is Clara?

**E**

Explain how you know this is a war story.

**V**

Which metaphor describes how nervous and excited she is?

**V**

Explain the description of the air-raid sirens providing **punctuation to the otherwise silent night**?

**P**

Write the conversation that follows between the guard and Clara.

Answers:

1. It meant they hadn't detected her yet
2. She's worried about getting caught
3. There's nothing to see and everything is empty and deserted (don't accept hot or dry)
4. He was worried he'd get into trouble
5. An unexploded bomb - it was green and gun-metal grey. She imagined the heat of it - imagery of it exploding

R: 13 - she'd had a party to celebrate being a teenager

E: Reference to air-raid sirens, blackouts, bombing of the community hall

V: Marching-band drumbeat of her heart

V: The noise of the sirens broke up the silence like punctuation in a sentence