

Ruth felt her way in the dark to the steps. But the steps had gone. There was just a pile of wood and bricks. Ruth was scared. 'There's no way out,' she screamed.

There were no street lights and no lights from houses. Mum switched on her small torch. 'Bother!' she said. 'The battery's gone.'

A long way away a siren started to wail. Ruth's heart raced as another siren, then another started up. Soon every siren in the town was wailing. Everyone knew what it meant.

'Where are you, Mum?' said Ruth. They had just left the cinema. It was very dark and it was raining.

They had just reached the bottom when a loud explosion shook the place. There was a choking cloud of dust and a tearing, ripping sound as something very big crashed down on the house. Everything round them seemed to fall apart.

Suddenly three searchlight beams stabbed upwards and lit up the clouds. Close by, a gun fired. Then they heard the dull, heavy sound of bombs falling. One of the German planes dropped a flare. For a moment everything was lit up. 'Look,' said Ruth. 'Let's shelter in that house.'

But that wasn't all. The bomb had not gone off and they were trapped in a room with it. 'I'm frightened, Mum,' she said. 'If it goes off we shall be blown to pieces.'

Mum came over and hugged her. 'That's the last time we go to the cinema in the blackout!' she said.

Ruth sat down, resting her back against something large and smooth. After a while she slept.

Mum's legs were trapped under a wooden beam. She smiled bravely. 'I'm O.K.' she said. 'Go for help.' But Ruth wasn't. She was looking at the thing she had slept against. It was large and smooth and shiny, a huge metal dustbin with fins.

After a while she stopped to listen. No reply. The only noise was a faint ticking. She hesitated, then put her ear to the bomb. The ticking was coming from inside it! It was a time bomb and its clock had started. When the ticking stopped it would explode and they would be blown to bits.

It took only a few seconds to climb the ladder. At the top they ran across the open ground. Suddenly there was a tremendous crash.

The house was empty. It had been bombed long ago. It still had its walls but the roof was full of holes. Inside, rickety steps led down to the cellar.