

SILVERTOWN

Bombing London

Jenny Page lives in Altmore Avenue in East Ham. She loves the East End and she loves sweets. She is married to Len Page and they have two children who have been evacuated since the bombing started. The year is 1940. Jenny is thirty seven.

The next door neighbours scurry out into the yard, blinking from their afternoon nap and stand with their mouths open.

‘Well ain’t that a thing?’ says Mickey ‘And me thinking it was the wireless.’

At number 27 Jenny is in her yard, looking up at the sky to the east where one hundred and fifty Heinkel and Dornier bombers are moving towards London.

Jenny watches and suddenly decides that she wants to see her mother. On Altmore Avenue men and women are running everywhere. Jenny can feel herself trembling.

The buzzing noise is getting louder now. Jenny walks faster and starts running down the High Street towards Caulfield Road. From somewhere along a sidestreet an ARP man is shouting ‘To your shelters!’ People begin to panic, racing along and leaving their abandoned shopping bags.

Just as Jenny’s legs are about to give way with running she reaches 147 Caulfield Road where she lived before she got married. She bursts through the door and sees her mother standing beside the bed.

‘Oh God, Jenny, Jenny, what’ll we come to?’

‘I’m here Mum,’ says Jenny and bundles her mother into the cupboard under the stairs. The sound of engines is loud. Jenny strikes a match and lights a paraffin lamp. There is nothing to be done but wait for whatever it is. Bombs? Incendiaries? Gas? Her mother is moaning now, her eyes closed. From somewhere quite close there comes an unmistakable thud and a slight tremor.

‘Oh my lord,’ cries her mother.

There is another thud, louder this time. The old woman’s shoulders are shaking and she starts to cry.

‘Mum, Mum, don’t cry,’ whispers her daughter. Jenny puts her hands into her pockets to stop the shaking. Inside something small and hard and sticky touches her fingers. Barley sugar, she thinks, ah, *barley sugar*. The thought of it comforts her.

Then another bomb thuds down somewhere close, followed by a shower of breaking glass.

‘Oh my god. Oh my god we’ll be buried alive,’ cries her mother ‘Jenny love, Jenny?’

‘Yes mum,’ whispers Jenny ‘I’m here.’

‘I ain’t half scared Jenny.’

Jenny reaches out and grasps her mother’s hand.

‘I know,’ she says and pulls out the barley sugar from her pocket and dusts it down. ‘Have a sweet Mum.’ She puts the barley sugar in her mother’s mouth and watches her suck on it. The dear old face is trembling. They sit like that for a moment while the thumps carry on but fainter now.

‘Ere,’ whispers her mother finally ‘You had any of them bangers from Paterson’s?’

‘No mum.’

‘They were letting em out generous with the coupons. I thought there must be

something wrong with em,' says her mother 'Your father would have said don't trust 'em, pet, we'll go without. We ain't eating no iffy bangers, he would have said. Not for no money. You know that? It wouldn't surprise me if they was made of nag's meat.'

'You reckon?'

'Have you seen 'em? Awful dark they are.'

From somewhere very distant there comes the crack of anti-aircraft fire.

Jenny's mother shakes her head 'Awful dark.'

The old lady takes another hard suck on her barley sugar and stops trembling.
The barley sugar has done it's work.