

Early warning

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A new experience of fear

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Early 1940. Siren's mournful wailing, signalling,

Our first air raid.

Fearfully looking at me, she switched off all the lights

Then she came to hug me close, her body trembling.

I'd never seen her like this, so full of fear and worry. "It's all right," I reassured her.

A distant bang, surely approaching thunder "Oh, God." Her voice displaying her terror.

"Down the stairs," she urged. The steps down from our flat were solid stone, but three steps from the bottom she sat down. "Don't dare go out there," she sobbed.

Our recently built Anderson shelter was at the bottom of the garden, and the banging was louder and closer.

I sat alongside her on the cold stone step and felt her trembling as she hugged me.

"Don't worry. I'm here," I said soothingly.

Baffled by her apparent terror, I, aged five, would learn within months, to appreciate the threat, the potential horror that so devastated my mother, and the world.

And she would quickly throw off her fear to become one of the bravest women I have known.