**The Gas Mask**

Grandma’s room smelt musty. Motz waited patiently while she fussed in the corner. “When your Mum told me that you were doing some work on the evacuation at school, I thought to myself, Mavis, I thought, you’ve got your old ration book but can I find it….?” Grandma carried on rummaging through an old suitcase, muttering to herself like she always did.

She began to take out all sorts of things. Motz stared at the pile of Grandma’s treasures. They would be great for the class’s history topic. There was an old poster that said, ‘Careless Talk Costs Lives’, a recipe for carrot cake which sounded disgusting, old coins, a bundle of letters – and a gas mask!

“Can I try this on Gran?” asked Motz, picking up the old mask. Grandma nodded her head, still ferreting around in the suitcase, intent on her search for the ration book. Motz tugged the mask on and pulled the straps down over his ears. It smelt of moth balls.

Immediately, he felt as if he had entered another world. He could see vague shapes but the mask misted up. His breathing sounded like Darth Vadar! But worse than that, he could hear someone shouting. The world seemed to jolt and, feeling rather afraid, Motz pulled the mask off.

He was standing in a street - rather like Grandma’s street - but a column of smoke towered above him. The air smelt of burning and in the distance he could hear a steady crump and thud that sounded like bombs landing. Motz stood transfixed, his heart pounding. What was happening to him? Where was he?

He gazed round and noticed that where Grandma’s house should have been was a pile of rubble. A piece of old wallpaper fluttered in the breeze; a door tilted at a crazy angle. Then he saw the girl, struggling under what looked like a large piece of wood. She looked ghostly because she was covered from head to toe in white dust as if she had been powdered. Her eyes were red and she was coughing and gasping, struggling like fish out of water. Without thinking, Motz clambered across the piles of bricks and smashed furniture. Frantically, he began tugging brick after brick, flinging them behind him. Motz could see now that she was trapped under a table, which had protected her - probably saved her life. The sides of the table were covered in a wire mesh and she was lying on a mattress. But part of the table had broken and trapped one of the girl’s legs. Motz stared at her face. It was twisted with pain.

The girl spluttered, coughing and wiping her mouth to get rid of the dust. “Thanks,” she wheezed. “The Morrison saved me.” Motz didn’t know what she was on about.

“Here,” he said, “you can climb out.” The hole was bigger by now and Motz used a broken plank to lever the table up, releasing her leg. “Wait a sec, I’ve got to get my best book. Here – take it” She passed out a small, brown booklet and Motz grabbed it. Then he took her by the arm and helped her up.

A few seconds later, the girl was out, brushing her dress down. “God help us, Mum’ll be livid with Hitler. She don’t like him much at the best of times!” she declared. At that moment, the man in uniform appeared again and started shouting – and a siren began wailing. “Get your gas masks on!” yelled the man and Motz automatically began to tug on the old mask. The girl grabbed him by the arm….

…… but as soon as the mask was on, he found it hard to see. The world swam in front of his eyes and misted. The shouts and the tormented sound of the siren faded. He stood still and tugged off the mask.

He was back in Grandma’s room and she had him by the arm. “Now stop fooling about with that old mask,” she said. “You’ll make yourself dizzy.” She paused and looked at Motz. “Ah there it is – you had it all along, you silly boy.” Gran reached out and took the old brown booklet from Motz. She held it lovingly. “My old ration book. My best book, that’s what I called it. My passport to an ounce of sugar, a twist of tea and a few boiled sweets.”