



Street Urchin

Tom knew he was late for dinner, and he knew what that meant. If he wasn't sat at the table at half-past-six on the dot, he wouldn't be getting any food. If he wasn't there by sunset, he'd be locked out until the morning. That was the arrangement he'd had with Jack ever since he'd moved into the spare room down in the rookeries. He knew it well enough, but right now there was nothing he could do about it.

If he was honest, Tom knew he was lost. That annoyed even more. He'd grown up on these streets, he knew them like the back of his unwashed hand. It was the dogs, he thought. They'd thrown him off his game, and he'd scrambled from alleyway to alleyway without really checking where he was going. It wasn't fair, the peelers weren't supposed to use dogs. It was only one necklace after all, and it wasn't like the old lady would miss it, was it? She was covered in pearls and he could practically smell the wealth on her.

Up ahead, maybe a mile away, Tom could see the beaming face of Big Ben. He took a moment to catch his breath and listen out for the sounds of anyone in pursuit. Other than the usual sounds of fights breaking out and people selling anything they could get their hands on, the night seemed peaceful. Now he knew where the clock was, he calmed down.

Scrambling on the floor, his fingers pressed up against what he had hoped to find. Darkness filled the alleyway, but he knew what he was looking for. Years as a tosher had taught his fingers what the edge of a manhole cover felt like and he was quickly down and into the sewers. It had been a while since he'd had to use the subterranean passages and the smell stung his eyes but he instantly felt back at home.

One of his greatest nights had been spent splashing around the filth. He'd almost been ready to call it a night when he'd found a huge ball of mud and coins caked together - a tosheroon. There'd been enough silver in that ball to keep him fed for a month. Thinking back, he'd found it not far from where he was now.



Even though he was risking a shut-out, Tom couldn't help but take a detour and check out the same spot once more. He didn't even think, he just let his feet take him through the old routine until he was stood next to an inlet where the water swirled and caught. Sure enough, something was glinting in the murky light that filtered down from the drain overhead.

Tentatively, not wanting to break whatever magic had brought him there, Tom crouched down and picked up the piece of gold. He wiped it on his jumper and nearly dropped it in surprise. It was a gold ring, worth a year's wage of anyone's money on its own. The twin jewels that topped it, though, meant that neither he nor Jack would ever have to go hungry again.

That was if he could make it back home in time.



INFERENCE FOCUS

1. Why did the jewel mean that they would never go hungry?
2. Why did being lost annoy Tom?
3. What happened to reassure Tom?
4. Why did Tom think it wasn't fair that he was being chased?
5. Who were the "peelers"?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

What had Tom done as a job before?

V

Which word tells you that the sewers were underground?

E

Explain how the author's use of Victorian slang improves the story.

S

What happened when Tom remembered the tosheroon he'd found?

P

Write the next paragraph in the story.